ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

25 Cents

Number 36

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AN ANTHOLOGY OF THE BEST DETECTIVE STORIES, NEW AND OLD

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An Open Letter to Film Director ALFRED HITCHCOCK

Dear Mr. Hitchcock:

Because we are tremendous admirers of *The Lady Vanishes, 39 Steps,* and the many other wonderful suspense films you have made . . . because you know that terror lurks in small things—a melody heard at midnight on a lonely road—curtains rustling at a window that should be barred tight against murder . . .

For these reasons we would like to call to your attention a new novel of adventure and fear which we think would lend itself wonderfully to filming—with the Hitchcock touch. It is called THE WIDOW MAKERS. Like Henry James' classic, *The Turn of the Screw,* its particular horror lies in the fact that it is a story that happens to children, three children, very young, very charming, very helpless, who find themselves pitted against a terrible evil—not supernatural evil this time—but the greater evil that lies in human beings greedy for power. These children are treated by the author with dignity as well as charm—as individual human beings, not story-book puppets.

After Maggie's sixth birthday party, which is gay and sunlit, Elliott Green's three children never again see their father alive. They are stranded in a European city. They do not know why or how the police investigation comes to nothing. They only know that the three of them must cling together and behave in the world as their father has taught them to.

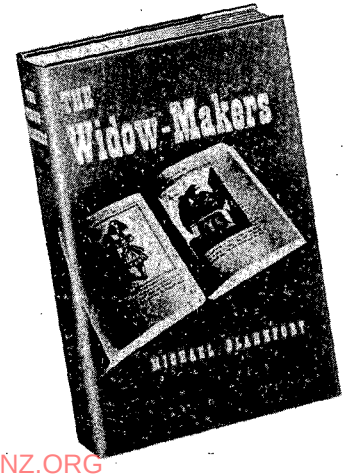
They come home to America, to Aunt Augusta who is now their guardian. They carry with them, although they do not know it, the evidence for which Elliott has sacrificed his life.

THE WIDOW MAKERS is the story of the forces of greed and death that gather to outwit these three children, of a ruthless violence that stops at nothing to gain its ends. It tells how 12-year old Tirza Green finds the evidence, and how she and Maggie and 10-year old Jamesy vote about its disposition; how they conceal it—knowing it must have been important to their father; how they weigh and judge the adults who bribe and cajole and threaten them. It is the story of the weapons they use—the only weapons they have—their innocence and integrity. It is the story of how they fulfill their father's mission.

There are a score of scenes here, Mr. Hitchcock, with which you could transfix your audience. For some of the villains are charming people—people who have a way with children, and even love the Green children in their own fashion. And all these scenes of desperate peril take place in the sun—in a rich, "safe" home where the children are leading what is to all appearances a sheltered, normal life.

For these reasons, Mr. Hitchcock, we commend to your attention, Michael Blankfort's fine and moving novel. We think that when you read it, you will want to film it, as a worthy successor to your other magnificent moving pictures.

Sincerely yours,
Inner Sanctum Mysteries
publishers of
THE WIDOW MAKERS



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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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12 AGAINST THE LAW

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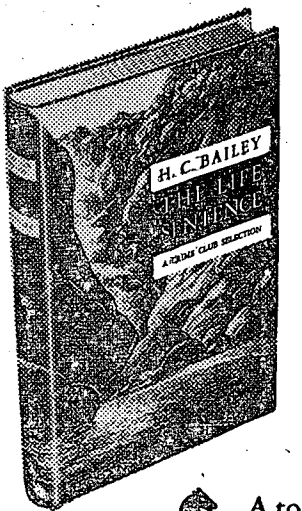

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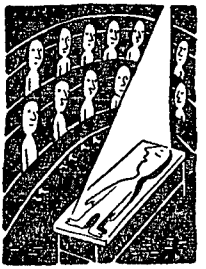

Let's discuss "The Fine Art of Thinking Up Titles; or, The Confessions of a Perfectionist" . . . Some detective-story writers actually start with a title. A glib phrase — smart, punnish, or just plain "solid" — catches the writer's fancy and the author, his title fixed, proceeds creatively to build a story around it. It is a fact that Craig Rice has practised this courageous cart-before-the-horse method. Her titles are usually flip — like THE LUCKY STIFF, HAVING WONDERFUL CRIME, *and* HOME SWEET HOMICIDE *— and even lend themselves to plot development. Indeed, her knack of contriving a clever title has brought Craig Rice unexpected dividends: her readers, aware that she is ever on the alert for a bright title, sit down and think them up for her. Recently Miss Rice showed your Editor a letter in which one of her fans suggested the title* VERY WARM FOR MAYHEM; *and, if memory serves, Miss Rice's forthcoming* MY KINGDOM FOR A HEARSE *also came to her in the mail.*

Even in the short story the title is not always inevitable to the author, either before or after the story is written. Many tales come to your Editor's desk with inadequate or inappropriate titles, and your Editor racks his busy brain to find (with the author's permission, of course) the perfect title. For example, two of the earlier Department of Dead Ends stories by Roy Vickers were originally called "The Cowboy of Oxford Street" and "The Clue-Proof Murders." Neither title seemed les mots justes. *We changed them to "The Case of the Merry Andrew" and "The Man Who Murdered in Public." And more recently a Department of Dead Ends tale called "The Flannel Petticoat" became — more provocatively, in our opinion — "The Man Who Was Murdered by a Bed."*

Cornell Woolrich's titles are usually excellent; yet we had the temerity to suggest two changes. Mr. Woolrich called one of his finest yarns by the rather prosaic title "Restaurant on Third Street;" even Mr. Woolrich was not too happy with this choice, so he devised an alternate title — "Plat du Jour." When the story was first published, the magazine disagreed with both of Mr. Woolrich's titles and called the tale "The Customer Is Always Right." To your Editor this last title seemed too smart-alecky: the story combined detection with horror, and we felt that a tinge of that horror, in some simple and stark way, should be reflected in the title. When we reprinted the story, we called it "The Fingernail" — and other editors have called it that ever since. Another Cornell Woolrich short reached us as "Body of a Well-Dressed Woman." This was metamorphosed, for reasons

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soundly inherent in the story itself, into "The Mathematics of Murder."

Which brings us to Michael Innes's first short story . . . The first EQMM short-story contest closed December 3, 1945 (the second annual contest closes October 20, 1946). Exactly ten days before the official closing of the first contest, we received an airmail envelope from The University of Adelaide in Adelaide, Australia, containing the first short story ever written about Inspector Appleby, Michael Innes's now-famous sleuth of the antipodes. Michael Innes (whose real name is John Innes Mackintosh Stewart) was so concerned that his manuscript would not arrive before the contest closed that he did not take time even to have it copied; and in his haste to get his story in under the wire he must have given it the first title that came to mind. And therein lies the inspiration for this treatise on 'tec titles.

Certainly Mr. Innes's book-length titles have been both interesting and provocative. Consider his HAMLET, REVENGE! *or* LAMENT FOR A MAKER *or* A COMEDY OF TERRORS; *his latest Inspector Appleby novel is called* THE UNSUSPECTED CHASM. *And there is a record of a Michael Innes book published in England under the fascinating title of* THERE CAME BOTH MIST AND SNOW.

Yet the first Inspector Appleby short story bore the following: "Professor Finlay's Final Lecture." This is the sort of title that makes one expect an old-fashioned subtitle — something like "Professor Finlay's Final Lecture; or, The Trials and Tribulations of a Struggling Savant." But in the last analysis, the story's the thing — not the title; although we hope our change of Mr. Innes's title adds more than a classic note to your enjoyment and appreciation of the first Inspector Appleby short ever to appear in print. In our humble opinion we have given Mr. Innes's first short story the perfect title — in tone, dignity, and precise appropriateness. But, strictly speaking, it was perhaps Sir David Evans who called this case a "Lesson in Anatomy."

LESSON IN ANATOMY

by MICHAEL INNES

ALREADY THE anatomy theatre was crowded with students tier upon tier of faces pallid beneath the clear shadowless light cast by the one elaborate lamp, large as a giant cart-wheel, near the ceiling. The place gleamed with an aggressive cleanliness; the smell of formalin pervaded it; its centre was a faintly sinister vacancy — the spot to which would presently be wheeled the focal object of the occasion.

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At Nessfield University Professor Finlay's final lecture was one of the events of the year. He was always an excellent teacher. For three terms he discoursed lucidly from his dais or tirelessly prowled his dissecting rooms, encouraging young men and women who had hitherto dismembered only dogfish and frogs to address themselves with resolution to human legs, arms and torsos. The Department of Anatomy was large; these objects lay about in a dispersed profusion; Finlay moved among them now with gravity and now with a whimsical charm which did a good deal to humanize his macabre environment. It was only once a year that he yielded to his taste for the dramatic.

The result was the final lecture. And the final lecture was among the few academic activities of Nessfield sufficiently abounding in human appeal to be regularly featured in the local press. Perhaps the account had become a little stereotyped with the years, and always there was virtually the same photograph showing the popular professor (as Finlay was dubbed for the occasion) surrounded by wreaths, crosses, and other floral tributes. Innumerable citizens of Nessfield who had never been inside the doors of their local university looked forward to this annual report, and laid it down with the comfortable conviction that all was well with the pursuit of learning in the district. Their professors were still professors — eccentric, erudite, and amiable. Their students were still as students should be, giving much of their thought to the perpetration of elaborate, tasteless, and sometimes dangerous practical jokes.

For the lecture was at once a festival, a rag, and a genuine display of virtuosity. It took place in this large anatomy theatre. Instead of disjointed limbs and isolated organs there was a whole new cadaver for the occasion. And upon this privileged corpse Finlay rapidly demonstrated certain historical developments of his science to an audience in part attentive and in part concerned with lowering skeletons from the rafters, releasing various improbable living creatures — lemures and echidnas and opossums — to roam the benches, or contriving what quainter japes they could think up. On one famous occasion the corpse itself had been got at, and at the first touch of the professor's scalpel had awakened to an inferno of noise presently accounted for by the discovery that its inside consisted chiefly of alarm clocks. Nor were these diversions and surprises all one-sided, since Finlay himself, entering into the spirit of the occasion, had more than once been known to forestall his students with some extravagance of his own. It was true that this had happened more rarely of recent years, and by some it was suspected that this complacent scholar had grown a little out of taste with the role in which he had been cast. But the affair remained entirely good-humored; tradition restrained the excesses into which it might have fallen; it was, in its own queer way, an

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approved social occasion. High University authorities sometimes took distinguished visitors along — those, that is to say, who felt they had a stomach for post-mortem curiosity. There was quite a number of strangers on the present occasion.

The popular professor had entered through the glass-panelled double doors which gave directly upon the dissecting table. Finlay was florid and very fat; his white gown was spotlessly laundered; a high cap of the same material would have given him the appearance of a generously self-dieted chef. He advanced to the low rail that separated him from the first tier of spectators and started to make some preliminary remarks. What these actually were, or how they were designed to conclude, he had probably forgotten years ago, for this was the point at which the first interruption traditionally occurred. And, sure enough, no sooner had Finlay opened his mouth than three young men near the back of the theatre stood up and delivered themselves of a fanfare of trumpets. Finlay appeared altogether surprised — he possessed, as has been stated, a dramatic sense — and this was the signal for the greater part of those present to rise in their seats and sing *For he's a jolly good fellow.* Flowers — single blooms, for the present — began to float through the air and fall about the feet of the professor. The strangers, distinguished and otherwise, smiled at each other benevolently, thereby indicating their pleased acquiescence in these time-honored academic junketings. A bell began to toll.

"*Never ask for whom the bell tolls,*" said a deep voice from somewhere near the professor's left hand. And the whole student body responded in a deep chant: "*It tolls for THEE.*"

And now there was a more urgent bell — one that clattered up and down some adjacent corridor to the accompaniment of tramping feet and the sound as of a passing tumbrel. "*Bring out your dead,*" cried the deep voice. And the chant was taken up all round the theatre. "*Bring out your dead,*" everybody shouted with gusto. "*Bring out your DEAD!*"

This was the signal for the entrance of Albert, Professor Finlay's dissecting-room attendant. Albert was perhaps the only person in Nessfield who uncompromisingly disapproved of the last lecture and all that went with it — this perhaps because, as an ex-policeman, he felt bound to hold all disorder in discountenance. The severely aloof expression on the face of Albert as he wheeled in the cadaver was one of the highlights of the affair — nor on this occasion did it by any means fail of its effect. Indeed Albert appeared to be more than commonly upset. A severe frown lay across his ample and unintelligent countenance. He held his six-foot-three sternly erect; behind his vast leather apron his bosom discernably heaved with manly emotion. Albert wheeled in the body — distinguishable as a wisp of ill-nourished humanity beneath the tarpaulin that covered it — and Fin-

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lay raised his right hand as if to bespeak attention. The result was a sudden squawk and the flap of heavy wings near the ceiling. Somebody had released a vulture. The ominous bird blundered twice round the theatre and then settled composedly on a rafter. It craned its scrawny neck and fixed a beady eye on the body.

Professor Finlay benevolently smiled; at the same time he produced a handkerchief and rapidly mopped his forehead. To several people, old stagers, it came that the eminent anatomist was uneasy this year. The vulture was a little bit steep, after all.

There was a great deal of noise. One group of students was doggedly and pointlessly singing a sea chanty; others were perpetrating or preparing to perpetrate sundry jokes of a varying degree of effectiveness. Albert, standing immobile beside the cadaver, let his eyes roam resentfully over the scene. Then Finlay raised not one hand but two — only for a moment, but there was instant silence. He took a step backwards amid the flowers which lay around him; carefully removed a couple of forget-me-nots from his hair; gave a quick nod to Albert; and began to explain — in earnest this time — what he was proposing to do.

Albert stepped to the body and pulled back the tarpaulin.

"And ever," said a voice from the audience, "at my back I hear the rattle of dry bones and chuckle spread from ear to ear."

It was an apt enough sally. The cadaver seemed to be mostly bones already — the bones of an elderly, withered man — and its most prominent feature was a ghastly *rictus* or fixed grin which exposed two long rows of gleamingly white and utterly incongruous-seeming teeth. From somewhere high up in the theatre there was a little sigh followed by a slumping sound. A robust and football-playing youth had fainted. Quite a number of people, as if moved by a mysterious or chameleon-like sympathy, were rapidly approximating to the complexion of the grisly object displayed before them. But there was nothing unexpected in all this. Finlay, knowing that custom allowed him perhaps another five minutes of sober attention at this point, continued his remarks. The cadaver before the class was exactly as it would be had it come before a similar class four hundred years ago. The present anatomy lesson was essentially a piece of historical reconstruction. His hearers would recall that in one of Rembrandt's paintings depicting such a subject —

For perhaps a couple of minutes the practiced talk flowed on. The audience was quite silent. Finlay for a moment paused to recall a date. In the resulting complete hush there was a sharp click, rather like the lifting of a latch. A girl screamed. Every eye in the theatre was on the cadaver. For its lower jaw had sagged abruptly open and the teeth, which were plainly dentures, had half extruded themselves from the gaping mouth, rather

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as if pushed outwards by some spasm within.

Such things do happen. There is a celebrated story of just such startling behavior on the part of the body of the philosopher Schopenhauer. And Finlay, perceiving that his audience was markedly upset, perhaps debated endeavoring to rally them with just this learned and curious anecdote. But, even as he paused, the cadaver had acted again. Abruptly the jaws closed like a powerful vice, the lips and cheeks sagged; it was to be concluded that this wretched remnant of humanity had swallowed its last meal.

For a moment something like panic hovered over the anatomy theatre. Another footballer fainted; a girl laughed hysterically; two men in the back row, having all the appearance of case-hardened physicians, looked at each other in consternation and bolted from the building. Finlay, with a puzzled look on his face, again glanced backwards at the cadaver. Then he nodded abruptly to Albert, who replaced the tarpaulin. Presumably, after this queer upset, he judged it best to interpose a little more composing historical talk before getting down to business.

He was saying something about the anatomical sketches of Leonardo da Vinci. Again he glanced back at the cadaver. Suddenly the lights went out. The anatomy theatre was in darkness.

For some moments nobody thought of an accident. Finlay often had recourse to an epidiascope or lantern, and the trend of his talk led people to suppose that something of the sort was in train now. Presently, however, it became plain that there was a hitch — and at this the audience broke into every kind of vociferation. Above the uproar the vulture could be heard overhead, vastly agitated. Matches were struck, but cast no certain illumination. Various objects were being pitched about the theatre. There was a strong scent of lilies.

Albert's voice made itself heard, cursing medical students, cursing the University of Nessfield, cursing Professor Finlay's final lecture. From the progress of this commination it was possible to infer that he was groping his way towards the switches. There was a click, and once more the white shadowless light flooded the theatre.

Everything was as it had been — save in two particulars. Most of the wreaths and crosses which had been designed for the end of the lecture had proved missiles too tempting to ignore in that interval of darkness; they had been lobbed into the centre of the theatre and lay there about the floor, except for two which had actually landed on the shrouded cadaver.

And Finlay had disappeared.

The audience was bewildered and a little apprehensive. Had the failure of the lighting really been an accident? Or was the popular professor obligingly coming forward with one of his increasingly rare and prized pranks? The audience sat tight, awaiting developments. Albert, returning from the switchboard, impatiently kicked a

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wreath of lilies from his path. The audience, resenting this display of nervous irritation, cat-called and booed. Then a voice from one of the higher benches called out boisterously: "The corpse has caught the dropsy!"

"It's a-swelling," cried another voice — that of a devotee of Dickens — "It's a-swelling wisibly before my eyes."

And something had certainly happened to the meagre body beneath its covering; it was as if during the darkness it had been inflated by a gigantic pump.

With a final curse Albert sprang forward and pulled back the tarpaulin. What lay beneath was the body of Professor Finlay, quite dead. The original cadaver was gone.

The vulture swooped hopefully from its rafter.

"Publicity?" said Detective-Inspector John Appleby. "I'm afraid you can scarcely expect anything else. Or perhaps it would be better to say notoriety. Nothing remotely like it has happened in England for years."

Sir David Evans, Nessfield's very Welsh Vice-Chancellor, passed a hand dejectedly through his flowing white hair and softly groaned. "A scandal!" he said. "A scandal — look you Mr. Appleby — that peggars description. There must be infestigations. There must be arrests. Already there are reporters from the pig papers. This morning I have been photographed." Sir David paused and glanced across the room at the handsome portrait of himself which hung above the fireplace. "This morning," he repeated, momentarily comforted, "I have been photographed, look you, five or six times."

Appleby smiled. "The last case I remember as at all approaching it was the shooting of Viscount Auldearn, the Lord Chancellor, during a private performance of *Hamlet* at the Duke of Horton's seat, Scamnum Court."

For a second Sir David looked almost cheerful. It was plain that he gained considerable solace from this august comparison. But then he shook his head. "In the anatomy theatre!" he said. "And on the one day of the year when there is these unseemly pehaviours. And a pody vanishes. And there is fultures — fultures, Mr. Appleby!"

"One vulture." Dr. Holroyd, Nessfield's professor of human physiology, spoke as if this comparative paucity of birds of prey represented one of the bright spots of the affair. "Only one vulture, and apparently abstracted by a group of students from the Zoo. The Director rang up as soon as he saw the first report. He might be described as an angry man."

Appleby brought out a notebook. "What we are looking for," he said, "is angry men. Perhaps you know of someone whose feelings of anger towards the late Professor Finlay at times approached the murderous?"

Sir David Evans looked at Dr. Holroyd and Dr. Holroyd looked at Sir David Evans. And it appeared to Appleby that the demeanor of each

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was embarrassed. "Of course," he added, "I don't mean mere passing irritations between colleagues."

"There is frictions," said Sir David carefully. "Always in a university there is frictions. And frictions produce heat. There was pad frictions between Finlay and Dr. Holroyd here. There was personalities, I am sorry to say. For years there has been most fexatious personalities." Sir David, who at all times preserved an appearance of the most massive benevolence, glanced at his colleague with an eye in which there was a nasty glint. "Dr. Holroyd is Dean of the Faculty of Medicine, look you. It is why I have asked him to meet you now. And last week at a meeting there was a most disgraceful scene. It was a meeting about lavatories. It was a meeting of the Committee for Lavatories."

"Dear me!" said Appleby. Universities, he was thinking, must have changed considerably since his day.

"Were there to be more lavatories in the Physiology Puilding? Finlay said he would rather put in a path."

"A path?" said Appleby, perplexed.

"A path, with hot and cold laid on, and an efficient shower. Finlay said that in his opinion Dr. Holroyd here padly needed a path."

"And did Dr. Holroyd retaliate?"

"I am sorry to say that he did, Mr. Appleby. He said that if he had his way in the matter Finlay's own path would be a formalin one. Which is what they keep the cadavers in, Mr. Appleby."

Dr. Holroyd shifted uneasily on his chair. "It was unfortunate," he admitted. "I must freely admit the unfortunate nature of the dispute."

"It was unacademic," said Sir David severely. "There is no other word for it, Dr. Holroyd."

"I am afraid it was. And most deplorably public. Whereas your own quarrel with Finlay, Sir David, had been a discreetly unobtrusive matter." Dr. Holroyd smiled with sudden frank malice. "And over private, not University, affairs. In fact, over a woman. Or was it several women?"

"These," said Appleby rather hastily, "are matters which it may be unnecessary to take up." Detectives are commonly supposed to expend all their energy in dragging information out of people; actually, much of it goes in preventing irrelevant and embarrassing disclosures. "May I ask, Sir David, your own whereabouts at the time of the fatality?"

"I was in this room, Mr. Appleby, reading Plato. Even Vice-Chancellors are entitled to read Plato at times, and I had given orders not to be disturbed."

"I see. And I take it that nobody interrupted you, and that you might have left the room for a time without being observed?"

Sir David gloomily nodded.

"And you, Dr. Holroyd?"

"I went to poor Finlay's final lecture and sat near the back. But the whole stupid affair disgusted me and I came away — only a few minutes, it seems, before the lights went out. I composed myself by taking a quiet

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walk along the canal. It was quite deserted."

"I see. And now about the manner of Finlay's death. I understand that you have inspected the body and realize that he was killed by the thrust of a fine dagger from behind? The deed was accomplished in what must have been almost complete darkness. Would you say that it required — or at least that it suggests — something like the professional knowledge of another anatomist or medical man?"

Holroyd was pale. "It certainly didn't strike me as the blind thrust of an amateur made in a panic. But perhaps there is a species of particularly desperate criminal who is skilled in such things."

"Possibly so." Appleby glanced from Holroyd to Sir David. "But is either of you aware of Finlay's having any connections or interests which might bring upon him the violence of such people? No? Then I think we must be very skeptical about anything of the sort. To kill a man in extremely risky circumstances simply for the pleasure of laying the body on his own dissecting table before his own students is something quite outside my experience of professional crime. It is much more like some eccentric act of private vengeance. And one conceived by a theatrical mind."

Once more Sir David Evans looked at Dr. Holroyd and Dr. Holroyd looked at Sir David Evans. "Finlay himself," said Sir David, "had something theatrical about him. Otherwise, look you, he would not have let himself pecome the central figure in this pig yearly joke." He paused. "Now, Dr. Holroyd here is not theatrical. He is pad tempered. He is morose. He is under-pred. But theatrical he is not."

"And no more is Sir David." Holroyd seemed positively touched by the character sketch of himself just offered. "He is a bit of a humbug, of course — all philosophers are. And he is not a good man, since it is impossible for a Vice-Chancellor to be that. Perhaps he is even something of a *poseur*. If compelled to characterize him freely" — and Holroyd got comfortably to his feet — "I should describe him as Goethe described Milton's *Paradise Lost*." Holroyd moved towards the door, and as he did so paused to view Sir David's portrait. "Fair outside but rotten inwardly," he quoted thoughtfully. "But of positive theatrical instinct I would be inclined to say that Sir David is tolerably free. Good afternoon."

There was a moment's silence. Sir David Evans' fixed expression of benevolence had never wavered. "Pad passions," he said. "Look you, Mr. Appleby, there is pad passions in that man."

Albert was pottering gloomily among his cadaver-racks. His massive frame gave a jump as Appleby entered; it was clear that he was not in full possession of that placid repose which ex-policemen should enjoy.

Appleby looked round with brisk interest. "Nice place you have here,"

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he said. "Everything convenient and nicely thought out."

The first expression on Albert's face had been strongly disapproving. But at this he perceptibly relaxed. "Ball-bearing," he said huskily. "Handles them like lambs." He pushed back a steel shutter and proudly drew out a rack and its contents. "Nicely developed gal," he said appreciatively. "Capital pelvis for child-bearing, she was going to have. Now, if you'll just step over here I can show you one or two uncommonly interesting lower limbs."

"Thank you — another time." Appleby, though not unaccustomed to such places, had no aspirations towards connoisseurship. "I want your own story of what happened this morning."

"Yes, sir." From old professional habit Albert straightened up and stood at attention. "As you'll know, there's always been this bad be'avior at the final lecture, so there was nothing out of the way in that. But then the lights went out, and they started throwing things, and something 'it me 'ard on the shins."

"Hard?" said Appleby. "I doubt if that could have been anything thrown from the theatre."

"No more do I." Albert was emphatic. "It was someone came in through the doors the moment the lights went out and got me down with a regular Rugby tackle. Fair winded I was, and lost my bearings as well."

"So it was some little time before you managed to get to the switch, which is just outside the swing doors. And in that time Professor Finlay was killed and substituted for the cadaver, and the cadaver was got clean away. Would you say that was a one-man job?"

"No, sir, I would not. Though — mind you — that body 'ad only to be carried across a corridor and out into the courtyard. Anyone can 'ave a car waiting there, so the rest would be easy enough."

Appleby nodded. "The killing of Finlay, and the laying him out like that, may have been a sheer piece of macabre drama, possibly conceived and executed by a lunatic — or even by an apparently sane man with some specific obsession regarding corpses. But can you see any reason why such a person should actually carry off the original corpse? It meant saddling himself with an uncommonly awkward piece of evidence."

"You can't ever tell what madmen will do. And as for corpses, there are more people than you would reckon what 'as uncommon queer interests in them at times." And Albert shook his head. "I seen things," he added.

"No doubt you have. But have you seen anything just lately? Was there anything that might be considered as leading up to this shocking affair?"

Albert hesitated. "Well, sir, in this line wot I come down to since they retired me it's not always possible to up'old the law. In fact, it's sometimes necessary to circumvent it, like. For, as the late professor was given to remarking, science must be served."

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Albert paused and tapped his cadaver-racks. "Served with these 'ere. And of late we've been uncommon short. And there's no doubt that now and then him and me was stretching a point."

"Good heavens!" Appleby was genuinely alarmed. "This affair is bad enough already. You don't mean to say that it's going to lead to some further scandal about body-snatching?"

"Nothing like that, sir." But as he said this Albert looked doubtful. "Nothing *quite* like that. They comes from institutions, you know. And nowadays they 'as to be got to sign papers. It's a matter of tact. Sometimes relatives comes along afterwards and says there been too much tact by a long way. It's not always easy to know just how much tact you can turn on. There's no denying but we've 'ad one or two awkwardnesses this year. And it's my belief as 'ow this sad affair is just another awkwardness — but more violent like than the others."

"It was violent, all right." Appleby had turned and led the way into the deserted theatre. Flowers still strewed it. There was a mingled smell of lilies and formalin. Overhead, the single great lamp was like a vast all-seeing eye. But that morning the eye had blinked. And what deed of darkness had followed?

"The professor was killed and laid out like that, sir, as an act of revenge by some barmy and outraged relation. And the cadaver was carried off by that same relation as what you might call an act of piety."

"Well, it's an idea." Appleby was strolling about, measuring distances with his eye. "But what about this particular body upon which Finlay was going to demonstrate? *Had* it outraged and pious relations?"

"It only come in yesterday. Quite unprepared it was to be, you see — the same as hanatomists 'ad them in the sixteenth century. Very interesting the late professor was on all that. And why all them young varmints of students should take this partikler occasion to fool around —"

"Quite so. It was all in extremely bad taste, I agree. And I don't doubt that the Coroner will say so. And an Assize Judge too, if we have any luck. But you were going to tell me about this particular corpse."

"I was saying it only come in yesterday. And it was after that that somebody tried to break into the cadaver-racks. Last night, they did — and not a doubt of it. Quite professional, too. If this whole part of the building, sir, weren't well-nigh like a strong-room they'd have done it, without a doubt. And when the late professor 'eard of it 'e was as worried as I was. Awkwardnesses we've 'ad. But body-snatching in reverse, as you might say, was a new one on us both."

"So you think that the outraged and pious relation had an earlier shot, in the program for which murder was not included? I think it's about time we hunted him up."

Albert looked sorely perplexed. "And so it would be — if we knew where to find him. But it almost seems as if there never was a cadaver with

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less in the way of relations than this one wot 'as caused all the trouble. A fair ideal cadaver it seemed to be. You don't think, now" — Albert was frankly inconsequent — "that it might 'ave been an accident? You don't think it might 'ave been one of them young varmint's jokes gone a bit wrong?"

"I do not."

"But listen, sir." Albert was suddenly urgent. "Suppose there was a plan like this. The lights was to be put out and a great horrid dagger thrust into the cadaver. That would be quite like one of their jokes, believe me. For on would go the lights again and folk would get a pretty nasty shock. But now suppose — just suppose, sir — that when the lights were put out for that there purpose there came into the professor's head the notion of a joke of his own. He would change places with the cadaver — "

"But the man wasn't mad!" Appleby was staring at the late Professor Finlay's assistant in astonishment. "Anything so grotesque — "

"He done queer things before now." Albert was suddenly stubborn. "It would come on him sometimes to do something crazier than all them young fools could cudgel their silly brains after. And then the joke would come first and decency second. I seen some queer things at final lectures before this. And that would mean that the varmint thinking to stick the dagger in the cadaver would stick it in the late professor instead."

"I see." Appleby was looking at Albert with serious admiration; the fellow didn't look very bright — nevertheless his days in the Force should have been spent in the detective Branch. "It's a better theory than we've had yet, I'm bound to say. But it leaves out two things: the disappearance of the original body, and the fact that Finlay was stabbed from behind. For if he did substitute himself for the body it would have been in the same position — a supine position, and not a prone one. So I don't think your notion will do. And, anyway, we must have all the information about the cadaver that we can get."

"It isn't much." Albert bore the discountenance of his hypothesis well. "We don't know much more about 'im than this — that 'e was a seafaring man."

The cadaver, it appeared, had at least possessed a name: James Cass. He had also possessed a nationality, for his seaman's papers declared him to be a citizen of the United States, and that his next-of-kin was a certain Martha Cass, with an indecipherable address in Seattle, Washington. For some years he had been sailing pretty constantly in freighters between England and America. Anybody less likely to bring down upon the Anatomy Department of Nessfield University the vengeance of outraged and pious relations it would have been difficult to conceive. And the story of Cass's death and relegation to the service of science was an equally bare one. He

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had come off his ship and was making his way to an unknown lodging when he had been knocked down by a tram and taken to the casualty ward of Nessfield Infirmary. There he had been visited by the watchful Albert, who had surreptitiously presented him with a flask of gin, receiving in exchange Cass's signature to a document bequeathing his remains for the purposes of medical science. Cass had then died and his body had been delivered at the Anatomy School.

And, after that, somebody had ruthlessly killed Professor Finlay and then carried James Cass's body away again. Stripped of the bewildering nonsense of the final lecture, thought Appleby, the terms of the problem were fairly simple. And yet that nonsense, too, was relevant. For it had surely been counted upon in the plans of the murderer.

For a few minutes Appleby worked with a stop-watch. Then he turned once more to Albert. "At the moment," he said, "Cass himself appears to be something of a dead end. So now, let us take the lecture — or the small part of it that Finlay had got through before the lights went out. You were a witness of it — and a trained police witness, which is an uncommonly fortunate thing. I want you to give me every detail you can — down to the least squawk or flutter by that damned vulture."

Albert was gratified, and did as he was bid. Appleby listened, absorbed. Only once a flicker passed over his features. But when Albert was finished he had some questions to ask.

"There was the audience," he said, " — if audience is the right name for it. Apparently all sorts of people were accustomed to turn up?"

"All manner of unlikely and unsuitable folk." Albert looked disgusted. "Though most of them would be medical, one way or another. As you can imagine, sir, a demonstration of a sixteenth-century dissecting technique isn't every layman's fancy."

"It certainly wouldn't be mine."

"I couldn't put a name to a good many of them. But there was Dr. Holroyd, whom you'll have met, sir; he's our professor of Human Physiology. Went away early, he did; and looking mighty disgusted, too. Then there was Dr. Wesselmann, the lecturer in Prosthetics — an alien, he is, and not been in Nessfield many years. He brought a friend I never had sight of before. And out they went too."

"Well, that's very interesting. And can you recall anyone else?"

"I don't know that I can, sir. Except of course our Vice-Chancellor, Sir David Evans."

Appleby jumped. "Evans! But he swore to me that — "

Albert smiled indulgently. "Bless you, that's his regular way. Did you ever know a Welshman who could let a day pass without a bit of 'armless deceit like?"

"There may be something in that."

" 'E don't think it dignified, as you might say, to attend the final lecture openly. But more often than not he's

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up there at the far doorway, peering in at the fun. Well, this time 'e 'ad more than 'e bargained for."

"No doubt he had. And the same prescription might be good for some of the rest of us." Appleby paused and glanced quickly round the empty theatre. "Just step to a telephone, will you, and ask Dr. Holroyd to come over here."

Albert did as he was asked, and presently the physiologist came nervously in. "Is another interview really necessary?" he demanded. "I have a most important — "

"We shall hope not to detain you long." Appleby's voice was dry rather than reassuring. "It is merely that I want you to assist me in a reconstruction of the crime."

Holroyd flushed. "And may I ask by what right you ask me to take part in such a foolery?"

Appleby suddenly smiled. "None, sir — none at all. I merely wanted a trained mind — and one with a pronounced instinct to get at the truth of a problem when it arises. I was sure you would be glad to help."

"Perhaps I am. Anyway, go ahead."

"Then I should be obliged if you would be the murderer. Perhaps I should say the first murderer, for it seems likely enough that there were at least two — accomplices. You have no objection to so disagreeable a part?"

Holroyd shrugged his shoulders. "Naturally, I have none whatever. But I fear I must be coached in it and given my cues. For I assure you it is a role entirely foreign to me. And I have no theatrical flair, as Sir David pointed out."

Once more Appleby brought out his stop-watch. "Albert," he said briskly, "shall be the cadaver and I shall be Finlay standing in front of it. Your business is to enter by the back, switch off the light, step into the theatre and there affect to stab me. I shall fall to the floor. You must then dislodge Albert, hoist me into his place and cover me with the tarpaulin. Then you must get hold of Albert by the legs or shoulders and haul him from the theatre."

"And all this in the dark? It seems a bit of a program."

Appleby nodded. "I agree with you. But we shall at least discover if it is at all possible of accomplishment by one man in the time available. So are you ready?"

"One moment, sir." Albert, about to assume the passive part of the late James Cass, sat up abruptly. "You seem to have missed me out. Me as I was, that is to say."

"Quite true." Appleby looked at him thoughtfully. "We are short of a stand-in for you as you were this morning. But I shall stop off being Finlay's body and turn on the lights again myself. So go ahead."

Albert lay down and drew the tarpaulin over his head. Holroyd slipped out. Appleby advanced as if to address an audience. "Now," he said.

And Appleby talked. Being thorough, he made such anatomical observations as his ignorance allowed.

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Once he glanced round at the corpse, and out of the corner of his eye glimpsed Holroyd beyond the glass-panelled door, his hand already going up to flick at the switch. A moment later the theatre was in darkness, and seconds after that Appleby felt a sharp tap beneath the shoulder-blade. He pitched to the floor, pressing his stop-watch as he did so. Various heaving sounds followed as Holroyd got the portly Albert off the table; then Appleby felt himself seized in surprisingly strong arms and hoisted up in Albert's place. Next came a shuffle and a scrape as Holroyd, panting heavily now, dragged the inert Albert from the theatre. Appleby waited for a couple of seconds, threw back the tarpaulin and lowered himself to the floor. Then he groped his way through the door, flicked on the light and looked at his watch. "And the audience," he said, "is now sitting back and waiting — until presently somebody points out that the cadaver is the wrong size. Thank you very much. The reconstruction has been more instructive than I hoped." He turned to Holroyd. "I am still inclined to think that it has the appearance of being the work of two men. And yet you managed it pretty well on schedule when single-handed. Never a fumble and just the right lift. You might almost have been practicing it."

Holroyd frowned. "Yachting," he said briefly, "— and particularly at night. It makes one handy."

And Albert looked with sudden suspicion at Nessfield's professor of Human Physiology. "Yachting?" he asked. "Now, would that have put you in the way of acquaintance with many seafaring men?"

Of James Cass, that luckless waif who would be a seafarer no longer, Appleby learned little more that afternoon. The cargo-vessel from which he had disembarked was already at sea again, and a couple of days must elapse before any line could be tapped there. But one elderly seaman who had recently made several voyages with him a little research did produce, and from this witness two facts emerged. There was nothing out of the way about Cass — except that he was a man distinctly on the simple side. Cass had been suggestible, Appleby gathered; so much so as to have been slightly a butt among his fellows. And Appleby asked a question: had the dead man appeared to have any regular engagement or preoccupation when he came into port? The answer to this was definitive. Within a couple of hours, Appleby felt, the file dealing with this queer mystery of the anatomy theatre would be virtually closed for good.

Another fifteen minutes found him mounting the staircase of one of Nessfield's most superior blocks of professional chambers. But the building, if imposing, was gloomy as well, and when Appleby was overtaken and jostled by a hurrying form it was a second before he recognized that he was again in the presence of Dr. Holroyd.

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"Just a moment." Appleby laid a hand on the other's arm. "May I ask if this coincidence extends to our both aiming at the third floor?"

Holroyd was startled, but made no reply. They mounted the final flight side by side and in silence. Appleby rang a bell before a door with a handsome brass plate. After a perceptible delay the door was opened by a decidedly flurried nurse, who showed the two men into a sombre waiting-room. "I don't think," she said, "that you have an appointment? And as an emergency has just arisen I am afraid there is no chance of seeing Dr. ——"

She stopped at an exclamation from Appleby. Hunched in a corner of the waiting-room was a figure whose face was almost entirely swathed in a voluminous silk muffler. But there was no mistaking that flowing silver hair. "Sir David!" exclaimed Appleby. "This is really a most remarkable rendezvous."

Sir David Evans groaned. "My chaw," he said. "It is one pig ache, look you."

Holroyd laughed nervously. "Shakespeare was demonstrably right. There was never yet philosopher could bear the toothache patiently — nor Vice-Chancellor either."

But Appleby paid no attention; he was listening keenly to something else. From beyond a door on the right came sound of hurried, heavy movement. Appleby strode across the room and turned the handle. He flung back the door and found himself looking into the dentist's surgery. "Dr. Wesselmann?" he said.

The answer was an angry shout from a bullet-headed man in a white coat. "How dare you intrude in this way!" he cried. "My colleague and myself are confronted with a serious emergency. Be so good as to withdraw at once."

Appleby stood his ground and surveyed the room; Holroyd stepped close behind him. The dentist's chair was empty, but on a surgical couch nearby lay a patient covered with a light rug. Over this figure another white-coated man was bending, and appeared to be holding an oxygen-mask over its face.

And Nessfield's lecturer in Prosthetics seemed to find further explanations necessary. "A patient," he said rapidly, "with an unsuspected idiosyncrasy to intravenous barbiturates. Oxygen has to be administered and the position is critical. So be so good —"

Appleby leaped forward and sent the white-coated holder of the oxygen-mask spinning; he flung back the rug. There could be no doubt that what was revealed was James Cass's body. And since lying on Professor Finlay's dissecting table it had sustained a great gash in the throat. It had never been very pleasant to look at. It was ghastly enough now.

Wesselmann's hand darted to his pocket; Holroyd leaped on him with his yachtsman's litheness and the alien dentist went down heavily on the floor. The second man showed no fight as he was handcuffed. Appleby

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looked curiously at Holroyd. "So you saw," he asked, "how the land lay?"

"In my purely amateur fashion I suppose I did. And I think I finished on schedule once again."

Appleby laughed. "Your intervention saved me from something decidedly nasty at the hands of Nessfield's authority on false teeth. By the way, would you look round for the teeth in question? And then we can have in Sir David — seeing he is so conveniently in attendance — and say an explanatory word."

"I got the hang of it," said Appleby, "when we did a very rough and ready reconstruction of the crime. For when, while playing Finlay's part, I glanced round at the cadaver, I found myself catching a glimpse of Dr. Holroyd here when he was obligingly playing First Murderer and turning off the lights. There was a glass panel in the door, and through this he was perfectly visible. I saw at once why Finlay had been killed. It was merely because he had seen, *and recognized*, somebody who was about to plunge the theatre in darkness for some nefarious, but not necessarily murderous, end. What did this person want? There could be only one answer: the body of James Cass. Already he had tried to get it in the night, but the housebreaking involved had proved too difficult."

The benevolent features of Sir David Evans were shadowed by perplexity. "But why, Mr. Appleby, should this man want such a body?"

"I shall come to that in a moment. But first keep simply to this: that the body had to be stolen even at great hazard; that when glimpsed and recognized by Finlay the potential thief was sufficiently ruthless to silence him with a dagger secreted for such an emergency — and was also sufficiently quick-witted to exploit this extemporaneous murder to his own advantage. If he had simply bolted with Cass's body and left that of Finlay the hunt would of course have been up the moment somebody turned the lights on. By rapidly substituting one body for the other — Finlay's for that of Cass — on the dissecting table, he contrived the appearance first of some more or less natural momentary absence of Finlay from the theatre, and secondly the suggestion of some possible joke which kept the audience wary and quiet for some seconds longer. All this gave additional time for his getaway. And — yet again — the sheerly grotesque consequence of the substitution had great potential value as a disguise. By suggesting some maniacal act of private vengeance it masked the purely practical — and the professionally criminal — nature of the crime.

"And now, what did we know of Cass? We knew that he was a seaman; that he traveled more or less regularly between England and America; that he was knocked down and presently died shortly after landing; and that he was a simple-minded fellow, easily open to persuasion. And we also

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knew this: that he had a set of rather incongruously magnificent false teeth; that in the anatomy theatre these first protruded themselves and then by some muscular spasm appeared to lodge themselves in the throat, the jaw closing like a vice. And we also knew that, hard upon this, a certain Dr. Wesselmann, an alien comparatively little known in Nessfield and actually a specialist in false teeth, hurried from the theatre accompanied by a companion. When I also learned from a seaman who had sailed with Cass that he was often concerned about his teeth and would hurry off to a dentist as soon as he reached shore, I saw that the case was virtually complete."

"And would be wholly so when you recovered Cass's body and got hold of these." Holroyd came forward as he spoke, carrying two dental plates on an enamel tray. "Sir David, what would you say about Cass's teeth?"

Nessfield's Vice-Chancellor had removed the muffler from about his jaw; the excitement of the hunt had for the moment banished the pain which had driven him to Wesselmann's rooms. He inspected the dentures carefully — and then spoke the inevitable word. "They are pig," he said decisively.

"Exactly so. And now, look." Holroyd gave a deft twist to a molar; the denture which he was holding fell apart; in the hollow of each gleaming tooth there could be discerned a minute oil-silk package.

"What they contain," said Appleby, "is probably papers covered with a microscopic writing. I had thought perhaps of uncut diamonds. But now I am pretty sure that what we have run to earth is espionage. What one might call the Unwitting Intermediary represents one of the first principles of that perpetually fantastic game at its higher levels. Have a messenger who has no notion that he *is* a messenger and you at once supply yourself with the sort of insulating device between cell and cell that gives spies a comforting feeling of security. Cass has been such a device. And it was one perfectly easy to operate. He had merely to be persuaded that his false teeth were always likely to give him trouble, and that he must regularly consult (at an obligingly low fee) this dentist at one end and that dentist at the other — and the thing was practically foolproof. Only Wesselmann and his friends failed to reckon on sudden death, and much less on Cass's signing away his body — dentures and all — to an anatomy school." Appleby paused. "And now, gentlemen, that concludes the affair. So what shall we call it?"

Holroyd smiled. "Call it the Cass Case. You couldn't get anything more compendious than that."

But Sir David Evans shook his beautiful silver locks. "No!" he said authoritatively. "It shall be called *Lesson in Anatomy*. The investigation has been most interesting, Mr. Appleby. And now let us go. For the photographers, look you, are waiting."

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James M. Cain's father was president of a college. His mother was a professional singer. Mr. Cain himself has been a student, a singer, a reporter, a soldier, an editor, a teacher, a political philosopher, and above all, embracing all his vocations and avocations, a writer. It was H. L. Mencken who encouraged James M. Cain to write fiction, and it was Mr. Mencken who published Cain's first story. Since then James Mallahan Cain has come a long way — THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE, SERENADE, DOUBLE INDEMNITY, MILDRED PIERCE . . .

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BRUSH FIRE

by JAMES M. CAIN

He banged sparks with his shovel, coughed smoke, cursed the impulse that had led him to heed that rumor down in the railroad yards that CCC money was to be had by all who wanted to fight this fire the papers were full of, up in the hills. Back home he had always heard them called forest fires, but they seemed to be brush fires here in California. So far, all he had got out of it was a suit of denims, a pair of shoes, and a ration of stew, served in an army mess kit. For that he had ridden twenty miles in a jolting truck out from Los Angeles to these parched hills, stood in line an hour to get his stuff, stood in line another hour for the stew, and then labored all night, the flames singeing his hair, the ground burning his feet through the thick brogans, the smoke searing his lungs, until he thought he would go frantic if he didn't get a whiff of air.

Still the thing went on. Hundreds of them smashed out flames, set backfires, hacked at bramble, while the bitter complaint went around: "Why don't they give us brush hooks if we got to cut down them bushes? What the hell good are these damn shovels?" The shovel became the symbol of their torture. Here and there, through the night, a grotesque figure would throw one down, jump on it, curse at it, then pick it up again as the hysteria subsided.

"Third shift, this way! Third shift,

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this way. Bring your shovels and turn them over to Shift Number Four. Everybody in the third shift, right over here."

It was the voice of the CCC foreman, who, all agreed, knew as much about fighting fires as a monkey did. Had it not been for the state fire wardens, assisting at critical spots, they would have made no progress whatever.

"All right. Answer to your names when I call them. You got to be checked off to get your money. They pay today two o'clock, so yell loud when I call your name."

"Today's Sunday."

"I said they pay today, so speak up when I call your name."

The foreman had a pencil with a little bulb in the end of it which he flashed on and began going down the list.

"Bub Anderson, Lonnie Beal, K. Bernstein, Harry Deever. . . ." As each name was called there was a loud "Yo," so when his name was called, Paul Larkin, he yelled "Yo" too. Then the foreman was calling a name and becoming annoyed because there was no answer. "Ike Pendleton! Ike Pendleton!"

"He's around somewhere."

"Why ain't he here? Don't he know he's got to be checked off?"

"Hey, Ike! Ike Pendleton!"

He came out of his trance with a jolt. He had a sudden recollection of a man who had helped him to clear out a brier patch a little while ago, and whom he hadn't seen since. He raced up the slope and over toward the fire.

Near the brier patch, in a V between the main fire and a backfire that was advancing to meet it, he saw something. He rushed forward, but a cloud of smoke doubled him back. He retreated a few feet, sucked in a lungful of air, charged through the backfire. There, on his face, was a man. He seized the collar of the denim jacket, started to drag. Then he saw it would be fatal to take this man through the backfire that way. He tried to lift, but his lungful of air was spent: he had to breathe or die. He expelled it, inhaled, screamed at the pain of the smoke in his throat.

He fell on his face beside the man, got a little air there, near the ground. He shoved his arm under the denim jacket, heaved, felt the man roll solidly on his back. He lurched to his feet, ran through the backfire. Two or three came to his aid, helped him with his load to the hollow, where the foreman was, where the air was fresh and cool.

"Where's his shovel? He ought to have turned it over to —"

"His shovel! Give him water!"

"I'm gitting him water; but one thing at a time —"

"Water! Water! Where's that water cart?"

The foreman, realizing belatedly that a life might be more important than the shovel tally, gave orders to "work his arms and legs up and down," a bucket of water, and little by little Ike Pendleton came back to life. He coughed, breathed with long

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shuddering gasps, gagged, vomited. They wiped his face, fanned him, splashed water on him.

Soon, in spite of efforts to keep him where he was, he fought to his feet, reeled around with the hard, terrible vitality of some kind of animal. "Where's my hat? Who took my hat?" They clapped a hat on his head, he sat down suddenly, then got up and stood swaying. The foreman remembered his responsibility. "All right, men, give him a hand, walk him down to his bunk —"

"Check him off!"

"Check the rest of us! You ain't passed the Ps yet!"

"O. K. Sing out when I call. Gus Ritter!"

"Yo!"

When the names had been checked, Paul took one of Ike's arms and pulled it over his shoulder; somebody else took the other, and they started for the place, a half mile or so away on the main road, where the camp was located. The rest fell in behind. Dawn was just breaking as the little file, two and two, fell into a shambling step.

"Hep! . . . Hep!"

"Hey, cut that out! This ain't no lockstep."

"Who says it ain't?"

When he woke up, in the army tent he shared with five others, he became aware of a tingle of expectancy in the air. Two of his tent mates were shaving; another came in, a towel over his arm, his hair wet and combed.

"Where did you get that wash?"

"They got a shower tent over there."

He got out his safety razor, slipped his feet in the shoes, shaved over one of the other men's shoulders, then started out in his underwear. "Hey!" At the warning, he looked out. Several cars were out there, some of them with women standing around them, talking to figures in blue denim.

"Sunday, bo. Visiting day. This is when the women all comes to say hello to their loved ones. You better put something on."

He slipped on the denims, went over to the shower tent, drew towel and soap, stripped, waited his turn. It was a real shower, the first he had had in a long time. It was cold, but it felt good. There was a comb there. He washed it, combed his hair, put on his clothes, went back to his tent, put the towel away, made his bunk. Then he fell in line for breakfast — or dinner, as it happened, as it was away past noon. It consisted of corned beef, cabbage, a boiled potato, apricot pie, and coffee.

He wolfed down the food, washed up his kit, began to feel pretty good. He fell into line again, and presently was paid, four-fifty for nine hours' work, at fifty cents an hour. He fingered the bills curiously. They were the first he had had in his hand since that day, two years before, when he had run away from home and begun this dreadful career of riding freights, bumming meals, and sleeping in flophouses.

He realized with a start they were

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the first bills he had ever earned in his twenty-two years; for the chance to earn bills had long since departed when he graduated from high school and began looking for jobs, never finding any. He shoved them in his pocket, wondered whether he would get the chance that night to earn more of them.

The foreman was standing there, in the space around which the tents were set up, with a little group around him. "It's under control, but we got to watch it, and there'll be another call tonight. Any you guys that want to work, report to me eight o'clock tonight, right here in this spot."

By now the place was alive with people, dust, and excitement. Cars were jammed into every possible place, mostly second-, third-, and ninth-hand, but surrounded by neatly dressed women, children, and old people, come to visit the fire fighters in denim. In a row out front, ice-cream, popcorn, and cold-drink trucks were parked, and the road was gay for half a mile in both directions with pennants stuck on poles, announcing their wares. Newspaper reporters were around too, with photographers, and as soon as the foreman had finished his harangue, they began to ask him questions about the fire, the number of men engaged in fighting it, and the casualties.

"Nobody hurt. Nobody hurt at all. Oh, early this morning, fellow kind of knocked out by smoke, guy went in and pulled him out, nothing at all —"

"What was his name?"

"I forget his name — Here — here's the guy that pulled him out. Maybe he knows his name —"

In a second he was surrounded, questions being shouted at him from all sides. He gave them Ike's name and his own, and they began a frantic search for Ike, but couldn't find him. Then they decided that he was the main story, not Ike, and directed him to pose for his picture. "Hey, not there; not by the ice-cream truck! We don't give ice cream a free ad in this paper. Over there by the tent."

He stood as directed, and two or three in the third shift told the story all over again in vivid detail. The reporters took notes, the photographers snapped several pictures of him, and a crowd collected. "And will you put it in that I'm from Spokane, Washington? I'd kind of like to have that in, on account of my people back there. Spokane, Washington."

"Sure, we'll put that in."

The reporters left as quickly as they had come, and the crowd began to melt. He turned away, a little sorry that his big moment had passed so quickly. Behind him he half heard a voice: "Well, ain't *that* something to be getting his picture in the paper?" He turned, saw several grins, but nobody was looking at him. Standing with her back to him, dressed in a blue-silk Sunday dress, and kicking a pebble, was a girl. It was a girl who had spoken, and by quick elimination he decided it must be she.

The sense of carefree goofiness that

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had been growing on him since he got his money, since the crowd began to jostle him, since he had become a hero, focused somewhere in his head with dizzy suddenness. "Any objections?"

This got a laugh. She kept her eyes on the pebble but turned red and said: "No."

"You sure?"

"Just so you don't get stuck up."

"Then that's O. K. How about an ice-cream cone?"

"I don't mind."

"Hey, mister, two ice-cream cones."

"Chocolate."

"Both of them chocolate and both of them double."

When they got their cones he led her away from the guffawing gallery which was beginning to be a bit irksome. She looked at him then, and he saw she was pretty. She was small, with blue eyes, dusty blonde hair that blended with the dusty scene around her, and a spray of freckles over her forehead. He judged her to be about his own age. After looking at him, and laughing rather self-consciously and turning red, she concentrated on the cone, which she licked with a precise technique. He suddenly found he had nothing to say, but said it anyhow: "Well, say — what are you doing here?"

"Oh — had to see the fire, you know."

"Have you seen it?"

"Haven't even found out where it is, yet."

"Well, my, my! I see I got to show it to you."

"*You* know where it is?"

"Sure. Come on."

He didn't lead the way to the fire, though. He took her up the arroyo, through the burned-over-area, where the fire had been yesterday. After a mile or so of walking, they came to a little grove of trees beside a spring. The trees were live oak and quite green and cast a deep shade on the ground. Nobody was in sight, or even in earshot. It was a place the Sunday trippers didn't know about.

"Oh, my! Look at these trees! They didn't get burnt."

"Sometimes it jumps — the fire, I mean. Jumps from one hill straight over to the other hill, leaves places it never touched at all."

"My, but it's pretty."

"Let's sit down."

"If I don't get my dress dirty."

"I'll put this jacket down for you to sit on."

"Yes, that's all right."

They sat down. He put his arm around her, put his mouth against her lips.

It was late afternoon before she decided that her family might be looking for her and that she had better go back. She had an uncle in the camp, it seemed, and they had come as much to see him as to see the fire. She snickered when she remembered she hadn't seen either. They both snickered. They walked slowly back, their little fingers hooked together. He asked if she would like to go with him to one of the places along the road to

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get something to eat, but she said they had brought lunch with them, and would probably stop along the beach to eat it, going back.

They parted — she to slip into the crowd unobtrusively; he to get his mess kit, for the supper line was already formed. As he watched the blue dress flit between the tents and disappear, a gulp came into his throat; it seemed to him that this girl he had held in his arms, whose name he hadn't even thought to inquire, was almost the sweetest human being he had ever met in his life.

When he had eaten, and washed his mess kit and put it away, he wanted a cigarette. He walked down the road to a Bar-B-Q shack, bought a package, lit up, started back. Across a field, a hundred yards away, was the ocean. He inhaled the cigarette, inhaled the ocean air, enjoyed the languor that was stealing over him, wished he didn't have to go to work. And then, as he approached the camp, he felt something ominous.

Ike Pendleton was there, and in front of him this girl, this same girl he had spent the afternoon with. Ike said something to her, and she backed off. Ike followed, his fists doubled up. The crowd was silent, seemed almost to be holding its breath. Ike cursed at her. She began to cry. One of the state policemen came running up to them, pushed them apart, began to lecture them. The crowd broke into a buzz of talk. A woman, who seemed to be a relative, began to explain to all and sundry: "What if she *did* go with some guy to look at the fire? *He* don't live with her no more! *He* don't support her — never *did* support her! She didn't come up here to see *him*; never even knew he was *up* here! My land, can't the poor child have a good time once in a while?"

It dawned on him that this girl was Ike's wife.

He sat down on a truck bumper, sucked nervously at his cigarette. Some of the people who had guffawed at the ice-cream-cone episode in the afternoon looked at him, whispered. The policeman called over the woman who had been explaining things, and she and the girl, together with two children, went hurriedly over to a car and climbed into it. The policeman said a few words to Ike, and then went back to his duties on the road.

Ike walked over, picked up a mess kit, squatted on the ground between tents, and resumed a meal apparently interrupted. He ate sullenly, with his head hulked down between his shoulders. It was almost dark. The lights came on. The camp was not only connected to county water but to county light as well. Two boys went over to Ike, hesitated, then pointed to Paul. "Hey, mister, that's him. Over there, sitting on the truck."

Ike didn't look up. When the boys came closer and repeated their news, he jumped up suddenly and chased them. One of them he hit with a baked potato. When they had run away he went back to his food. He paid no attention to Paul.

In the car, the woman was working

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feverishly at the starter. It would whine, the engine would start and bark furiously for a moment or two, then die with a series of explosions. Each time it did this, the woman would let in the clutch, the car would rock on its wheels, and then come to rest. This went on for at least five minutes, until Paul thought he would go insane if it didn't stop, and people began to yell: "Get a horse!" "Get that damn oilcan out of here and stop that noise!" "Have a heart! This ain't the Fourth of July!"

For the twentieth time it was repeated. Then Ike jumped up and ran over there. People closed in after him. Paul, propelled by some force that seemed completely apart from himself, ran after him. When he had fought his way through the crowd, Ike was on the running board of the car, the children screaming, men trying to pull him back. He had the knife from the mess kit in his hand. "I'm going to kill her! I'm going to kill her! If it's the last thing I do on earth, I'm going to kill her!"

"Oh, yeah?"

He seized Ike by the back of the neck, jerked, and slammed him against the fender. Then something smashed against his face. It was the woman, beating him with her handbag. "Go away! Git away from here!"

Ike faced him, lips writhing, eyes glaring a slaty gray against the deep red of the burns he had received that morning. But his voice was low, even if it broke with the intensity of his emotion. "Get out of my way, you! You got nothing to do with this."

He lunged at Ike with his fist — missed. Ike struck with the knife. He fended with his left arm, felt the steel cut in. With his other hand he struck, and Ike staggered back. There was a pile of shovels beside him, almost tripping him up. He grabbed one, swung, smashed it down on Ike's head. Ike went down. He stood there, waiting for Ike to get up, with that terrible vitality he had shown this morning. Ike didn't move. In the car the girl was sobbing.

The police, the ambulance, the dust, the lights, the doctor working on his arm, all swam before his eyes in a blur. Somewhere, far off, an excited voice was yelling: "But I *got* to use your telephone, I *got* to, I tell you! Guy saves a man's life this morning, kills him tonight! It's a *hell* of a story!" He tried to comprehend the point of this; couldn't.

The foreman appeared, summoned the third shift to him in loud tones, began to read names. He heard his own name called, but didn't answer. He was being pushed into the ambulance, handcuffed to one of the policemen.

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The creator of detective Thatcher Colt offers you an unusual "adventure and memoir" about the creator of Sherlock Holmes. This fact story has all the suspense and appeal of a fictional mystery, with a tantalizing puzzle to boot. It also carries the Doylesque titular tradition two steps further — not only is it an "adventure" and a "memoir," but it contains a "sign of the four" and even a singular "return." Shades of Sherlock!

THE FACE FROM BEYOND

by ANTHONY ABBOT

ONCE upon a time I matched wits in a game of the living and the dead with a past-master of mystery — Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

The creator of Sherlock Holmes and of all his bizarre problems of murder was making a lecture tour of the United States. It was at the time when he had startled a world of more or less sensible people by displaying what he insisted were photographs of ghosts. You would go to a photographer who was also a spiritualistic medium. Under varying "test conditions" you sat for a photograph, and when the negative was developed it might show one or two or even more "extras" — faces showing through vapor, visages of the departed. Some of these ectoplasmic photographs had been shown up as products of trickery. But others remained inexplicable.

One night at dinner I reproached Sir Arthur. "By showing these spirit pictures to the public, you help to delude people — the possibility of fraud is impossible to avoid."

"Oh, no! You can set up safeguards, controls, that rule out trickery!"

I shook my head.

"Name any set of conditions you can think of," I said rashly, "and I will prove they can be overcome."

The great detective-story writer grinned amiably; then clicked off the following stipulations on his fingers:

1. There must be an investigating committee completely above suspicion.
2. This committee must buy the plates or films to be used in the experiment.
3. They must supply the camera.
4. The plates or films must never leave their possession or control at any time. They must load the film into the camera. They must remove it, they must develop it, and they must print the picture.
5. The medium must be allowed to touch nothing except the bulb or the spring of the camera in order to take the picture.
6. The picture, when developed and printed, must show an "extra" face in addition to the image of the person photographed.
7. The extra picture must be the face not of a living person but of one irrefutably dead.
8. *This extra picture of the dead per-*

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son must be a different pose from any picture taken while the person was living.

"Whew!" I exclaimed. But the boast had been made. Now I was faced with the problem of finding a loophole in those most rigid restrictions.

Author's note: It might be interesting for the reader to put EQMM magazine aside for ten minutes and try to figure out how he would have solved this problem. Then go on with the story.

First we formed a committee consisting of a retired army officer, who believed in nothing except his sidearms; a woman magazine editor, and a physician. These three went together to a well-known photographer's supply shop in New York City. They purchased a packet of film and marked the wrapping with their initials to make substitution impossible. It was decided to use a camera owned by the physician, and the experiment took place in his office. The lady editor agreed to pose.

On the great night we assembled at the physician's house. The medium was kept out of the room until the seal was broken on the marked package and the film loaded into the camera. The editor lay on a couch, and the physician focused the camera and arranged the lights. Then the medium — a little man with drooping blond mustaches and pale, watery eyes — was allowed to come in. He whispered to himself for some minutes, and made mysterious, hypnotic passes over the prostrate figure of the editor. She closed her eyes, trying to be cooperative. Then the medium, with a dazed air, walked over to the camera, looked vacantly at the couch, and squeezed the bulb. Three shots were taken, but at no time was the medium allowed to touch the film.

Immediately afterward, the committee retired to the dark room and developed the films. Yes, there was an "extra" on the very first film — the face of a bearded man with a bald head and searching eyes.

"Holy smoke!" gasped the doctor. "I recognize him. And he *is* dead."

The fact was that this "extra" was a vivid likeness of Professor James H. Hyslop, founder of the American Society for Psychic Research. One more condition remained. We took the picture to Dr. Hyslop's son, and he stated that it was unlike any portrait of his father.

Yet the picture was a complete imposture!

"Miraculous!" exclaimed Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. "How on earth did you do it?" And then, with a smile that topped his chagrin, he added, "I sound like Watson asking Sherlock Holmes to explain!"

I did explain. The first thing was to obtain a photograph of some appropriate person, and it must be a picture that was not known to exist. Hyslop's selection was easy. He was the most famous American scientist in the field

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of psychic research. I studied several known photographs of Dr. Hyslop, and then called at the studio where, long ago, he had sat for his pictures. The proprietor had filed away many pictures of Hyslop which the Professor had *rejected* and which consequently no one else had ever seen. The photographer willingly sold me one of these. So the first step was taken. We had an unknown picture of a well-known dead man.

Next I went in to a popular photographic supply shop and asked for the head salesman. To him I confided the whole plot and assured him that it was being done as a test, and that the full truth would be told immediately afterward. I also gave him a United States greenback and promised him another if the experiment succeeded. Already aware of the kind of film that would be called for, I purchased a packet and took it to a photographer friend. We steamed open the seal without tearing the paper, and my friend succeeded in putting the image of the unknown picture on one of the films. Then we replaced the doctored film in the packet, sealed it up again, and I took it back to the shop. It was not difficult to suggest, as one of the conditions, that the committee buy a film at some well-known place, and they themselves suggested this familiar shop. When they arrived there, the head salesman was ready for them. I had described the committee to him carefully. He waited on them, sold them the faked film, and they went away well satisfied. The rest worked itself.

"Well!" said Sir Arthur. "That's quite a let-down! The whole thing is childishly simple."

"Yes," I said, "that's what Watson used to tell Sherlock Holmes!"

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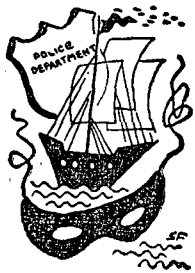
LEST WE FORGET



Lest we forget, your Editor reminds you that we owe a colossal debt to the pulp magazines. Most of our "big names" in the field of the detective story got their start — a sort of ordeal-in-print — or published some of their best-known tales in the humble and so often frowned-upon pulps. The great Dashiell Hammett full-lengths appeared serially in "Black Mask," long before they became famous but not long before pulp aficionados had appraised Hammett's true stature; and "Black Mask" gave us the best of Carroll John Daly, Frederick Nebel, Erle Stanley Gardner, Raymond Chandler — to name only a few of "Black Mask's" glorious roster. "Argosy" too has a proud record — it brought us many oldtimers who went on to bigger and better criminological careers, including Hulbert Footner's Madame Storey and H. Bedford Jones's now forgotten John Solomon adventures.

Do you remember "Flynn's Weekly"? Do you remember that "Flynn's" ran R. Austin Freeman's Dr. Thorndyke stories, H. C. Bailey's Reggie Fortune shorts, and even Arthur Morrison's neglected tales of Horace Dorrington, probably the first combination crook-and-detective in the history of the genre? "Detective Story Magazine's" contribution is also of noteworthy span, historically and nostalgically: there were, among many others, the Gray Phantom exploits by Herman Landon, the Thubway Tham saga by Johnston McCulley, and the Ringer retributions by Edgar Wallace (some of which also appeared in "Dime Mystery Book Magazine").

The finest of the Arsène Lupin novels were serialized in "The Popular Magazine," as were some of the Thinking Machine stories by Jacques Futrelle. And how many of you recall that Agatha Christie, before her eminence as a slick-magazine writer, gave us some of her cleverest series in the pulps? Oh, yes, it's a matter of publishing record: the earlier Hercule Poirot short stories came to us in "Blue Book"; the Miss Marple chronicles appeared in "Detective Story Magazine"; and the Harley Quin-and-Mr. Satterthwaite harlequinades brought sparkle and ingenuity to "Flynn's" otherwise "thrill-of-truth" pages.

If memory serves, Mignon G. Eberhart's first book was published in 1929; and if memory still serves, Miss Eberhart was also a contributor to "Flynn's" historic homicides. Four years prior to her first book, "Flynn's" offered its readers a hospital mystery and a nurse detective created by one

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Mignon Good Eberhart — that's how she called herself in those days.

Once before we reprinted a Mignon G. Eberhart short story which has never been included in any of her published books — "Postiche," about Susan Dare, in EQMM of September 1944. There are not many short stories about Susan Dare that are still "new" to book readers, but here is another. "The Flowering Face" does not come from Miss Eberhart's pulp period: it appeared originally in that chic slick, "Delineator," a typical women's magazine that occasionally printed untypical stories. Yes, men will like "The Flowering Face" too . . .

THE FLOWERING FACE

by MIGNON G. EBERHART

THERE was a knock and then another knock, and Susan Dare left a murder half completed and went to the door.

The murder — that particular murder — was, however, entirely fictional. The caller was Katherine Vandeman, who said, "Darling," breezily, entered with a rush and then saw the sheet of paper on the typewriter.

"Oh, my dear," she said contritely. "I've interrupted you. Sorry. But I had to see you."

She rushed on breathlessly: "We are going up on French Crescent today. And we want you to go along. Now please don't say you can't."

Susan hesitated, and Katherine came closer to her so that Susan caught a whiff of cigarette smoke and lemon verbena, curiously mingled. Katherine Vandeman was a tall woman, angularly built; there was about her a kind of hard, bright surface which made people feel that she was herself hard and superficial. Only her eyes, to Susan, were like bright clear holes through a stage curtain, for they were sober and clear, and somehow let you through to the Katherine Vandeman who was behind all that brightness and loudness and hardness. Her eyes and, amended Susan, the way she cared for and nursed her invalid brother-in-law. His name was Cecil Vandeman, he was perhaps ten years younger than Katherine and had been, since the death of Katherine's husband, her only close personal tie. Thinking of him Susan said:

"Who's we?"

"Cecil," said Katherine, bright eyes looking past Susan. "Norman Bridges. Sally Lee Sully. You."

"How's Cecil?" asked Susan because it was the customary inquiry. Katherine was slow about replying.

"We've had another specialist," she said finally. "I'm not altogether sure that I agree with him."

"He doesn't think Cecil is worse?" said Susan quickly.

"Oh, no, no. He thinks — or says he thinks — there's definite improve-

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ment." Katherine pulled off her gloves slowly. "You'll go with us, won't you? We'll drive up to the inn, then leave the car and take the trail to the top. It isn't much of a climb — two hours, perhaps. And Norman just telephoned the weather bureau and says it will be clear."

She looked again into Susan's eyes and caught the indecision. And quite suddenly she said in a still voice that had lost all its bright vivacity:

"Please come, Susan Dare."

There was something urgent, something indefinably compelling about it. Susan said lamely: "But there's a friend of mine coming from Chicago."

"Who?" said Katherine.

"His name is Byrne. Jim Byrne. I had a note this morning — written sort of hurriedly." Susan fished among the papers on the table and found a sheet of yellow copy paper with a few scrawled lines on it — "Dear Susie: Have an unexpected week end and am coming down to stay at Hunt Club. Find two good riding horses and don't plan any work. Arrive Thursday or Friday night ten o'clock train. Have greatest regard for you and your stories but kindly do not mention six-letter word meaning to destroy by violence in my hearing. JIM."

"He's just finished reporting the Blank case," said Susan explanatorily. "It must have been pretty awful."

"Reporting. Why, that's —" Katherine stopped abruptly.

"Yes, that's the Jim Byrne."

"Oh — oh, yes, I see. I remember his name now. Well — we shall be home before ten. But you might leave a message at the Hunt Club, just in case we are delayed. Tell him" — Katherine hesitated again. "Tell him to join us — if he wants to. We'll stop for you after lunch. Goodbye, my dear."

Susan didn't really know Katherine Vandeman very well, although the Vandeman place, a huge old Southern home with stables and blue-grass meadows, lay in the valley only two miles distant from Susan's own small cabin. Susan knew in a vague way that Katherine's husband, considerably older than Katherine, had left his widow a sizable chunk of the Vandeman money. She knew, too, that Norman Bridges, a lawyer and an old friend of the Vandeman family, was, in a rather prolonged and desultory way, a suitor of Katherine's.

They called for Susan shortly after noon. Katherine at the wheel of her long convertible coupé, with Cecil beside her and Norman Bridges' tweed shoulders beside Sally Lee Sully's green sweater in the rumble.

Sally Lee Sully, a slim, dark-eyed girl with the sweet languid loveliness of a magnolia, waved prettily to Susan. Norman Bridges' white teeth flashed below his dark moustache, and Cecil got out slowly, unfolding his slender length and explaining to Susan that the seat was wide enough for the three of them if Susan didn't mind a little crowding.

Afterward Susan tried desperately to recall anything at all significant that was said or done during the trip

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to French Crescent. But there was nothing. Katherine drove furiously with bursts of speed and sudden brakings which threatened to send her passengers through the windshield but somehow never did.

They wound higher and higher. The road became narrow and the hairpin curves sharper. Great expanses of sky and space would appear suddenly ahead and then would vanish as the car swerved, and be replaced by a tangled wall of pines and mountain growth.

It was perhaps four o'clock when they reached the inn, from which only a footpath continued to the mountain top. Katherine parked expertly in the space reserved for cars. And it took expert parking. They had emerged upon a small plateau backed by the steep rise of the mountain but dropping suddenly away upon sheer space and distance with only a little line of white stones to mark that irregular, precipitous edge. Katherine turned, backed, turned until Cecil, looking rather pale, said: "That's enough, K. You're only a few feet from the edge."

Katherine stopped at last, and Susan took a long breath of relief and Cecil slid out of the car. He turned and smiled, holding out his thin hand to Susan to help her. "Are your legs cramped?" he asked.

"A little," said Susan, "I've kept my foot on a brake that wasn't there practically all the way up the mountain."

"I know," said Cecil. "One does when K is driving. She" — He stopped so abruptly that Susan glanced up into his thin young face and followed the direction of his gaze. Norman Bridges had climbed down from the rumble seat and was holding up his arms for Sally Lee Sully. He was laughing, his white teeth flashing and his face red from the wind, and Sally Lee, blown and lovely, was looking down and laughing, too, so that her eyes were half-closed and darkly shadowed. As she stood above them her green sweater and knitted skirt clung to her body like wet cloth to a clay model and outlined breast and hips and slim young waist against the dull sky. Still smiling gently she brought up one knee in order to step over the side of the car and poised there for an unforgettable instant, one lovely line of grace flowing into another.

The instant that she stood there against the sky became sharp and terribly clear. The still, pearly sky. The pines. The consciousness of space and a plateau and a precipice at its edge, and a great spreading valley below.

And Norman Bridges holding his strong arms up toward Sally, with the laugh on his face becoming fixed while Sally Lee Sully poised there with her beautiful body against the sky.

Katherine banged the heavy door of the car, and the scene dissolved. Sally Lee slid into Norman's arms. Somebody cried: "What a view!" And Katherine was walking away from the car, and they had all turned to look out across space and valley.

"Don't go too near the edge," said

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Katherine sharply to somebody and Susan realized that she was speaking to Cecil and that, insensibly drawn, they had all drifted toward the little line of stones that marked the edge of the cliff.

Susan stepped nearer, resisting her inborn dread of high places, and looked over. A sheer drop of how many feet — a hundred — three hundred? She couldn't guess.

"Over here," said Cecil to Susan, "is the Crescent. At the right. Just behind the car." She turned at his gesture toward the car again. "It's really just a ravine but it's so sharp and sudden that it's like a gash. It's a queer sort of thing — like a cleft in the face of the plateau. Probably made in some past geological age by a mountain torrent, though it's dry now. Nothing but rocks at the bottom."

No wonder he'd been uneasy when Katherine backed and turned and maneuvered! Susan stood at the rear of the long car and observed with frozen horror that the gleaming left fenders of the car were actually not more than four feet from that sharp, jagged cut.

It was, as Cecil said, an irregular, gash-like cleft interrupting the smooth floor of the plateau. The ravine was narrow, not more than fifteen feet wide where it began at the cliff edge and narrowing to a point. Beyond it was the small plateau again, except that, there, it was not cleared except for a path that ran from the edge of the parking space, around the end of the short, sharp ravine and out again to a bench which was almost directly opposite the car. Katherine spoke quickly and loudly.

"There's a grand view from the other side of the Crescent," she said. "The view from the bench over there is better even than from the plateau on this side. Shall we walk around?"

But Sally Lee Sully, strolling toward them across the parking space, vetoed that. "We'd better get started up the mountain, if we're going."

"Right," agreed Cecil. "Weatherman to the contrary, it's going to be cloudy."

So they started, Katherine plunging ahead and becoming flushed and panting after the first half-mile. Norman trudged along easily beside Susan, smoking a pipe. Sally Lee Sully strolled behind them with an appearance of laziness and fatigue until you realized that she remained exactly twenty feet behind the whole way and might as easily have kept with them. Cecil stayed behind. It was the accustomed thing and occasioned no comment and no offers of company. As they reached a turn in the sharply climbing path that brought them out above the inn and the plateau, they could see him, clear and small below them. It was Norman who saw him first.

"There's Cecil — over on the Crescent. On the bench. See him? He's reading."

"He's always reading." That was Sally Lee.

They went on. And it was a pleasant enough climb. Except that it was cloudy. So cloudy that by the time

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they reached the top there was no view at all and nothing to do but sit on dampish boulders above a faintly moving, pearly gray blanket and smoke and rest before they started down again.

By the time they reached the inn it was twilight, with the car looming ghostily out of the mist, its sleek gray sides wet, and the windows of the inn lighted and showing distant-looking blobs of radiance.

"Light looks good," said Norman who was by that time merely a thick black bulk trudging beside Susan. "Hope they've got a fire. Hi, Katherine — I'd better turn on the car lights — did you lock the door?"

"Only the ignition. Do turn on the lights, Norm. I don't suppose anybody will be coming up tonight in this fog, though."

Norman vanished, a glow appeared before the car, and Katherine was the first to reach the inn. And at the sound of her step on the porch, the door flung open, letting out light and warmth, with Cecil outlined against the light welcoming them and exclaiming about the fog.

And it was Cecil who suggested that they have dinner at the inn before attempting the descent.

"You are all tired and cold. And the fog is bad. Anyway I've already ordered dinner."

Katherine hesitated and looked at Susan, and afterward Susan wondered what would have happened had she herself insisted on undertaking their trip down the mountain at once. Or rather when it would have happened.

But she did not insist. The open fire leaping in the huge fireplace, the smells of dinner, the table already laid and drawn up to the fire, and more than anything, the prospect of the fog's eventually lifting, were irresistible. And Norman, entering, looked at Katherine and looked at Cecil and closed the door behind him.

"The fog can't get worse," he said. "And it may lift a bit. Tell the girl to bring on the steaks, Cecil. I'm hungry as a bear." Then Norman added abruptly: "Golly, I forgot to bring in the champagne."

"Champagne!" Katherine's voice was strained.

Sally Lee Sully lifted languorous dark eyes to look at Katherine, and Norman said: "Of course. Champagne is the official betrothal toaster. I doubt very much if an engagement to marry is legal without champagne."

"Engagement," said Katherine in a strange voice.

"Engagement," said Norman, facing her solidly. "Sally Lee Sully engaged to marry Cecil Vandeman. Announcement made by old friend of family, Norman Bridges." He paused. Cecil somehow was standing between Sally Lee Sully and Katherine — his hand was on Sally Lee but he looked at Katherine. Then Norman crossed to Katherine and forced her to look away from Cecil and at him. "Come now, dear — they've waited patiently till Cecil is better. Now he's well enough to marry ——"

Katherine jerked away from him.

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"He's not well enough!" she cried.

In the stricken, uncomfortable silence, the door from the kitchen opened brusquely and the waitress entered, laden tray in her hands.

"How do you do?" she said chattily to Norman, who was nearest the table. "Shall I serve dinner now?"

"All right," said Cecil. His hand on Sally Lee increased its pressure, as if comfortingly, before he left her. "I'll get the champagne," he said, obviously thankful for the interruption. And Norman nodded quickly: "Do. It's in the rumble seat."

Cecil picked up his hat and reached the door and paused there, looking at Katherine's rigid back, and Norman said: "Fog is bad, Cecil. Don't stumble and drop the champagne. The car lights are on, you can see all right. Look here, my girl, have you got some glasses?"

Cecil's eyes waited another instant for Katherine to turn. She did not move and he glanced then at Sally Lee, made a cheerful little gesture with his hand, and the door opened, letting in black fog, and closed.

"Goblets will do," said Norman to the waitress. "Bring 'em on. Anything will do when it's champagne."

Katherine whirled from the window.

"You had planned this all along," she said harshly. "You and Cecil. You were going to tell me like this when Sally Lee was here — and Susan — because you thought that in their presence I would say nothing."

"It was Cecil's plan ——"

"And yours too, Norman. And Sally Lee's. Probably Sally Lee's plan first. She knew I would object."

"Suppose we did plan it, Katherine," Norman said with stubborn gentleness. "I have waited too."

Sally Lee looked at her ankles and drawled: "Don't be that way, Katherine. I won't eat Cecil."

"You!" said Katherine simply.

"The main thing," drawled Sally Lee, "is that Cecil loves me. And he's free, white and twenty-one, in spite of the sick baby you've tried to make him."

It was a dreadful silence — dreadful to sit there and see Sally Lee's languid sweetness, to watch that dull red slowly sweep out of Katherine's face and her long angular hands double themselves as if she could strike Sally Lee's smiling, pretty face.

Finally Norman said fumblingly: "Now, Sally Lee —" And Katherine said in a choked way: "Did you hear that, Norman? Did you hear what she said? And I've put everything away, you and everything, to nurse and care for Cecil. Yet you say let them marry. Norman, is it possible you do not realize that she's marrying him only for his money?"

Sally Lee Sully showed herself suddenly and pettishly angry.

"I meant you were making him spineless and childish. He's not half the invalid you've made him think he is. You've tried to dominate him. Well, you can't any more. He loves me. Suppose I am marrying him for his money. It's going to make him

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happy. If you are so devoted to him I should think that would please you."

Katherine's clenched hands relaxed hopelessly. She said to Norman:

"You see what you've done."

"I've done nothing," said Norman, standing his ground solidly. "Be reasonable, Katherine. Sally Lee isn't marrying him just for his money. He wants her. And she'll make him a good wife."

"It divides the Vandeman fortune in half if Cecil ——" Sally Lee Sully checked herself as if frightened at what her vicious little tongue had been about to say and looked from Katherine quickly and supplicatingly to Norman. "You see, Norm — if Cecil doesn't marry, the whole thing would come to Katherine."

"Be reasonable," said Norman pleadingly again. "You angered her, Katherine. After all, you didn't exactly welcome her into the family." He approached Katherine and put his hand on her arm but she jerked savagely away from him and went to the door, her sport shoes making heavy, angry footfalls. She opened the door and fog poured in and it was black beyond.

"Cecil ought to be coming," she said as if detached from the painful, ugly quarrel. She peered into the fog.

"He'll be back in a minute," said Norman, relievedly pouncing upon a new topic. "Hope the fog lifts before we go down the mountain. Ah, here come the glasses. And the steaks."

The waitress entered again, glasses clinking faintly and musically and the fragrance of broiling steaks filling the room.

Sally Lee Sully looked at the steaks smoking on the table, hesitated, shrugged, let her skirt drop over her beautiful knees, and rose. Her walk across to where Katherine stood, still peering into the fog beyond the open door, was to Susan's awakened eyes a thing of potent grace. Odd, she'd never perceived the danger in the girl before.

Sally Lee put her hand on Katherine's arm. She was all wooing, all tender and sweet. "K, dear, forgive me. I didn't mean anything — You've been so good to Cecil. I'll try to be as good a wife as you've been a sister."

Norman beamed. Katherine finally tore her seeking eyes from the fog and darkness and looked slowly and searchingly into the girl's flower-like face. And it was then that she said a very strange and dreadful thing.

"Sally Lee," she said, "you will never be Cecil's wife."

Under that searching, bright regard, Sally Lee shrank back. And Norman said roughly: "Shut the door, Katherine. It's cold. Cecil will be here in a moment."

"He ought to be here now," said Katherine. "I'm going to look for him."

"Don't be silly, K, he's all right."

"He ought to have returned," she said stubbornly. "You know, Norm, he has no sense of direction. He's probably wandering about somewhere."

"Nonsense. He can see the lights

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from the inn."

It was just there, Susan realized later, that from somewhere, stealthily, cautiously, scarcely observed, there crept into the situation a strange sense of tension, of foreshadowing.

But it was a good ten minutes before it became definite. Observable. Tangible, even.

Ten minutes of discussion — of increasingly anxious watching, of Norman first and then Katherine vanishing into the fog and shouting from the edge of the porch into the whirling darkness beyond, soft and black and impenetrable, with not a gleam of light anywhere except from the open door and windows behind them.

But Cecil did not return. And did not reply.

And he was not at the dark and silent car, nor anywhere between the car and the inn; and the lights and the hurriedly summoned proprietor and the two servants and themselves could not discover him and could not make him hear. They were all somehow out in the fog and there were blobs of lights from electric torches and the streaming lights again from the car, and shouting voices everywhere and then that diapason of sound became suddenly still, silenced by one scream.

That was Katherine's scream when they found him.

He was at the bottom of the ravine, huddled on the rocks, dead.

It was the proprietor and Norman who crawled down there with flashlights and ropes. Mercifully the darkness and the fog veiled the thing from Katherine's eyes. And during those black moments while the men painfully, slowly, with difficulties which were too readily to be surmised, managed to remove the slender, broken body and carry it at last toward the inn, Susan sat in the blank dampness beside Katherine and held the woman's strong, angular hands.

Norman, panting, returned at last and put his arm around Katherine and drew her toward the inn. Susan and Sally Lee followed. The light gravel crunched under their feet.

All at once after that black interlude of horror they were again in the long dining room. The fire was stirred to flames. Katherine, looking like a sleepwalker, was sitting before it. The men, Norman and the proprietor and the fat, frightened cook, were talking — talking in circles, repeating themselves, exclaiming, saying how it happened. Sally Lee Sully was crouched, slim and white and silent. The waitress — white, now, and incoherent with excitement — was saying they ought to have turned on the light on the point beyond the Crescent.

And the whole thing was as the proprietor said: Cecil had gone across the open space toward the car. Had become confused in the fog and darkness. Had passed the car without knowing it. Had stepped over the edge of the ravine. It was all perfectly — terribly — clear.

"It's a cruel drop," said the proprietor. "But I never thought of anybody just walking over it like that. The lights ought to have been turned

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on."

"Lights?" said Norman.

"The light beyond the Crescent. Have it strung up on a wire. It is connected on the same switch with the porch light. But it was so foggy tonight — nobody here but you folks here in the dining-room."

"Don't you make a habit of turning it on every night?"

But they didn't. Why should they? So few people came up at night. It was only during the summer that people from town came up for parties and liked to walk out and sit on the ledge beyond the ravine.

Norman, shuddering, was reproaching himself bitterly.

"I sent him out, Katherine. But I never thought — how could I? He walked out into the fog — aiming toward the car — he was excited, poor Cecil. Never had a head for direction. I ought to have realized the danger. It's all my fault."

Katherine finally spoke. "It's nobody's fault," she said. Her voice was heavy and slow, each word dropping like a weight. "Well — what are we going to do?"

Telephone? But there was no telephone.

"We're so far from town," said the innkeeper. "But I'll watch the — I'll watch while you send to town."

And the waitress sobbed and said again, if she'd only turned on the lights, but how was she to know?

"Him going out into pitch-dark and the fog besides," she said, wiping her eyes.

Something stirred in Susan and quite automatically began to function. The suddenness of the thing, the confusion and, submerging everything, the blinding, swirling fog had shocked and, in a sense, submerged her. Even now she spoke without conscious purpose. And she said only, in a small, clear voice:

"Darkness! But the lights of the car were turned on. He would have been guided by that."

There was an odd, short silence. Then they looked at her.

No one spoke. Under all those eyes Susan smoothed back her hair and heard herself saying quite definitely: "The lights of the car were on. Norman turned them on when we returned from the mountain top." She paused and added because she couldn't help it and because it was so very obvious: "But there were no lights anywhere when we went to the porch to look for Cecil. There were certainly no lights at all, then."

It was a puzzle.

Not a very great puzzle, to be sure; one doubtless with the simplest of explanations. Norman had turned on the car lights. The doors of the car were not locked. For some trivial reason someone had turned out those lights.

But it was a puzzle that all at once assumed significance.

The car lights would have guided Cecil safely to the car. He would not have passed beyond it in the darkness. Those front lights would have made a blob of yellow that would have served

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as a beacon.

She thought that far and realized that no one was speaking.

But presently the tensely ruminative look in the waitress's face bore fruit. She said with a burst: "Oh, yes, there were lights. I saw them from the window."

"When did you see them?" asked Susan.

"I remember exactly. I was just going from this room into the kitchen after glasses and I looked out the window and saw a light. And it was right after Mr. Vandeman had gone out for the champagne. I'm sure about it."

"Why, yes," said Katherine slowly. "The lights of the car were turned on. I'm sure Cecil could have seen them from the porch. And they were on, when he left. I could see the glow myself from the window as he went out the door. The light was dim and looked far away on account of the fog but quite clear enough to guide him. Who turned them off?"

Again no one spoke for a moment. Then Norman said: "I certainly turned on the lights. And when we stepped out on the porch to call for Cecil I remember thinking how dark it was. If Katherine saw the lights as Cecil left and they were gone when we went to call him ——"

The proprietor interrupted anxiously.

"None of us touched your car, Mrs. Vandeman. I was in the kitchen the whole time after you arrived. The cook was there, too, and Jennie" — he indicated the waitress — "was coming and going from the dining room. None of us was anywhere near your car."

Katherine's hand made a weary gesture and Sally Lee Sully said suddenly:

"Perhaps Cecil himself turned out the lights."

There was another thoughtful moment. Then Katherine said: "You mean he reached the car, for some reason turned out the lights and then accidentally stepped over the edge?"

Norman was frowning perplexedly.

"I suppose it's possible. But why would he turn out the lights?"

Katherine rose abruptly as if she could not bear talking.

"We'll never know what happened," she said, staring into the flames. "Never. Come — we'd better go down the mountain. It's impossible, of course, to take" — she did not say "Cecil"; instead she simply stopped and then continued: "The coupé is so small. I'll get hold of Dr. Benham. He'll know what to do."

But before they started Susan did a bit of private exploring — the odd little puzzle of the lights was still a puzzle.

The switch beside the door did control both the light on the long porch, a single bare bulb set into its sloping rustic roof, and another light high up in the trees above the bench on the far side of the ravine; too, the car lights were on now, streaming dully into the fog. The fog veiled their brilliance. Still it would have

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been impossible, even in the fog, to miss those lights.

And Susan herself had seen that resultant glow when Norman turned them on. And Katherine had seen it from the window at the time Cecil went out toward it. And Susan herself had seen that there was no light anywhere at the moment when all four of them stepped from the dining room to the porch in order to call Cecil.

Then had he reached the car? And if he had reached the car, why had he turned off the lights before returning to the inn?

Susan walked slowly across the gravel toward the car. Back at the inn were lights and muffled voices. But the mountain was silent and dark, and felt rather than seen. Off toward the right, veiled by that soft, damp blackness was the sharp edge of the plateau. Just before her was the car and beyond the car was the narrow wedge of blackness, cruel and masked by fog, dividing the plateau from the ledge beyond. She measured her steps, noted how the strong lights of the car were blurred and veiled and only gradually became perceptible as lights, and reached the car. Across that dark space which she knew lay at her feet and away up in the trees was the light; that, too, had it been lighted, would have been a guide to Cecil. Or rather not a guide but a warning. Then the confused sound of footsteps was on the gravel and shadows were emerging from the fog.

"Let me drive, K." That was Norman's voice.

And Katherine said wearily: "No, Norman. It will give me something to do. You and Sally Lee can ride in the rumble."

But when she had got into the car and fumbled for the ignition, she said quite suddenly to Susan: "I was wrong, Susan. I can't drive."

"I'll drive," offered Susan quickly.

Susan found the road and entered it, and very cautiously made the first of those fumbling, fog-blinded curves.

It wasn't going to be any fun, getting that long car down the mountain. It hadn't been so bad coming up. Cecil had been with them, then. Cecil.

But Cecil was dead now. In an accident. Cecil who had been the focus of a queer, dreadful quarrel. They were peaceful now, Norman and Katherine and Sally Lee. Peaceful now that Cecil was dead and they had him no longer to quarrel about.

Susan peered into the fog and turned and watched for the road. It was somehow hypnotic, that constant moving through dense swirling mists, that constant heightening of tension in all the nerves, that straining for perception, that groping, groping into fog. Groping into fog. Trying to feel out imperceptible things.

Murder!

The word suddenly entered and possessed Susan's consciousness. It was unexpected. And it was like an alarm.

Now why should she think of that? No reason at all. Murder.

If it was Cecil's death she was trying to connect with murder, that was all wrong. Cecil had stepped over a

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cliff while all four of them were together in that lighted dining-room. Talking. Quarreling about Cecil.

But Cecil was not murdered.

Now look here, Susan, she thought, let's examine this. Don't dismiss it as if you were afraid of it; prove to yourself that there's no murder. No murder. No murder because he couldn't have been murdered when there was no one to murder him.

And there was no motive. No one who would profit by his death and no one to whom that death would be welcome.

Katherine, of course, would inherit the whole of the Vandeman fortune instead of only half of it, if Cecil died without heirs. Without a wife. But Katherine was devoted to Cecil. And she had enough money as it was. Sally Lee Sully stood to lose at Cecil's death. And Norman Bridges, unless he married Katherine, was not affected in any way. Although if he married Katherine, Cecil's death just now doubled Katherine's (and thus in a sense, Norman's own) fortune.

Katherine stirred and said abruptly: "But he's better off dead. Marriage with Sally Lee" — she did not finish.

The broken sentence fitted into a small groove in Susan's thoughts.

No motive. No murderer. Then there was no murder.

On through the fog, carrying consciousness of murder. Murder becoming part of the fog.

Against her will, against her reason, the thing persisted. Against ——

If Cecil had turned out the lights of the car after leaving it, then where was the champagne? It should be in that case shattered somewhere in that deadly steep ravine. But was it?

The question was sharp and sudden like an unexpected flash of lightning.

Susan consciously and clearly began to think and build and remember. It was as if that flash of light had briefly illumined a dark room and she knew not what the objects it contained were, but merely that they were there.

And Susan knew that she had to go back. To go back now before others came. Before — a glow of yellow was rounding a curve twenty feet ahead. Susan put on brakes and clutched for the horn, and its long mellow notes echoed in unseen valleys. Susan's car stopped. The other car stopped. There were voices and men's figures before the lights.

And out of the fog came Jim Byrne. Out of the fog and up to the car.

"Susan?" he cried. "Good Lord! Why didn't you stay where you were till the fog lifted!"

Susan said something; she never knew what. Another man — Jim called him vaguely Landy — approached and Susan heard Katherine speaking to him.

"There was an accident," she was saying as if she knew him. "Cecil fell into the ravine."

Terse explanations, horrified low-voiced talk, Norman there, too, telling them. Somehow she must let Jim know that it was no accident. That it was murder. And that they must go

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back. That they must discover that evidence before it was destroyed.

Jim's blunted, agreeably irregular face loomed rather sternly from the blackness. His sensitive mouth looked tight, his chin, as always, faintly pugnacious.

Susan touched his hand. And as he looked directly at her, she said in a voice that was scarcely more than a whisper: "It's murder."

He heard it. His eyes became aware and his face very still. She whispered: "We must go back. Arrange it — somehow. And let me ride with you."

He arranged it. Smoothly and with his customary resource and aplomb. She believed that there was some general feeling that they were to bring the body down the mountain in Landy's sedan. No one objected. Norman took Susan's place at the wheel. With Jim and Landy at the side of the road watching lest the wheels go over the edge and shouting directions, he managed to reverse the long coupé.

And Susan, shaking a little, was beside Jim, in the front seat of the Landy sedan.

The moving rear light of the coupé ahead made a small red signal, warning them of curves. But the man Landy and Sally Lee were in the tonneau. Sally Lee was drenched with fog and chilled, and white, and very appealing. She had to ride inside, now that she could. Susan could hear Landy being comforting.

The trouble was Susan couldn't talk to Jim. The story came out but only in outline, only the surface of it, and she could not tell Jim that first they must make sure about the champagne bottles. That they must look for a string or a rope with a weight on one end. Or neither, but instead something unpredictable.

That because the motive was what she felt it was, they must prevent another murder. That was what made it so urgent. That was why they had to find evidence, conclusive evidence — somehow.

One murder and then, after a while, another. The murder of Cecil was only half that grim program. The second murder would complete it.

"He never had a head for direction," Sally Lee was saying plaintively.

Faintly, ironically, the little red gleam ahead led them over that blind, winding journey.

Once Susan said, under cover of Landy's heavier voice: "Why did you start up the mountain?"

"Nerves." He grinned at her and then sobered. "One of my fey nights. Fog and general unrest. I got your note; you hadn't returned."

There was the inn, lights in the windows and on the porch. Across, beyond the Crescent, the light in the trees made a blur. The coupé was already parked before it, and as the gravel spattered under the sedan tires the door opened. And still there was no chance to talk to Jim. Suppose she had made a mistake. Jim helped her out of the car.

"What shall I do?"

"Talk. Ask questions. Especially about the lights."

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"You girls had better go inside to the fire," Landy was saying, speaking to both of them and looking at Sally Lee.

It was not difficult to approach, in the confusion and shifting lights, the rumble seat of the coupé and search for champagne bottles that *were not there*. Not difficult either to walk quietly in the shadows behind the parked cars toward the Crescent. The lights from the cars, the porch light, enabled her to pick her way along. Here was the place where the Vandeman car had been parked — here were its tire marks. That dark rift was the edge of the ravine. Across it and considerably to the right was the light in the trees.

She hesitated. She could, if she was very careful not to make a misstep, find her way along the path that skirted the ravine. The others had gone into the inn. The light among the trees over there would serve as a guide. But the fog was treacherous, inconceivably bewildering.

She took a few steps and stopped sharply. Was there a curious faint echo of crunching gravel? If so, it was silent now. Susan swallowed her heart and went on, feeling her way cautiously, step by step.

There were shrubs now as she passed the curve of the ravine and the path rose a little. Somewhere beyond the clouds there must be a rising moon, full and white, for the fog had taken on a kind of gray gleam. Her feet were yet on the path and it was easier than she'd expected. But she didn't like being alone in the fog.

Something white loomed out of it and she stopped dead still and terrified before she saw that it was only the bench. The bench where Cecil had sat reading during the afternoon.

Above her was the light and she could see it now as a light and not as just a bright glow. It was a bulb, shaded by a reflector, swathed in mist. As this side of the plateau was a little higher than the inn side, the light looked from the side of the inn much higher than it proved actually to be. For it was not more than twelve feet off the ground. It was a makeshift affair, strung as if for only temporary use on a drop-cord and hanging over a convenient branch with the slack taken up and tied in a loop.

Something rustled again in a dripping thicket nearby and Susan turned with a kind of gasp of comprehension and something very like terror. Her return over that path and around the black depth that was the ravine was, in spite of its caution, like a flight. Yet she knew that there was no one there in the fog. Everyone was at the inn. Once on the cleared space and headed toward the parked cars and the inn she lost some of her unreasoning terror. It was only murder that she was afraid of; the fact of it; the presence of it which was like a tangible thing.

The instrument of murder was there beyond that opened door, where light made a long, broad radiance.

She was panting, though, when she reached the porch of the inn. What had they done? What had they de-

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cided? She controlled her breath and smoothed her hair back tightly under her brown beret and entered. And walked upon a tableau.

Katherine stood, tall and vigorous, though her long face was pale, before the fire. Sally Lee was seated languidly in a chair, looking very helpless and very beautiful. Norman was standing beside Sally Lee. Landy was leaning lazily over the back of a chair and looked perplexed. The inn-keeper and the fat cook with his white apron twisted around his waist were looking worried and the waitress, Jennie, was peering in at the kitchen door.

And Jim was sitting casually on the edge of a table. He had just finished saying something, for there was about them an air of intent listening, and Jim was very definitely the focus of that strained attention. No one seemed to be aware of Susan's entrance but she knew that Jim had noted it. Norman cleared his throat and said:

"I don't understand you."

Jim flicked a glance toward Susan.

"It's a question of satisfying the coroner. It makes no difference to me of course. It's nothing to me — except a very regrettable affair. But you see, the — body *was moved.* And it was a death by violence. I'm only telling you that the coroner will be bound to ask questions. It's just as well to be perfectly clear in your minds about what happened. This business of the lights, now, seems to me confusing. Probably it isn't, really. In the excitement of the moment" — he turned suddenly and directly to Katherine. "You turned on the car lights? When was that?"

"When we came down from the mountain. About six o'clock. But I didn't turn them on. Norman did it for me."

"Then it was you, Mr. Bridges, who turned on the lights?"

"Why, yes, of course," said Norman.

"You are sure? I mean, your sleeve didn't catch on the switch as you turned from the car and turn them off again — something like that?"

"Certainly, I'm sure. Anyway, Katherine saw the car lights from the window just as Cecil left this room and went into the fog."

"That's right," said Jim agreeably. Evidently from the talk in the car and from the questions that had preceded Susan's entrance he had got a fairly complete version of the thing. "Did anybody else see the lights after you arrived at the inn?"

Susan started to mention the waitress when the girl darted forward. "I did," she said eagerly. "Just after Mr. Vandeman went out the door."

"I see," said Jim. "Then what happened to the car lights between the time when Mrs. Vandeman and Jennie saw them, and the time when you opened the door and went out to call for Cecil? You have all said that there was no light anywhere then."

Norman looked impatient.

"That's just the point. There's only one thing that could have happened. Cecil must have turned them out."

"Why?" said Jim again, gently.

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But Katherine's long face was beginning to look angry.

Norman said with decision: "We don't know. One never knows exactly how accidents happen. But since we were all here in this room when it must have happened (or in the kitchen), there is no other explanation. Cecil for some reason turned out those lights, started into the fog away from the car, perhaps turned back for something. We'll never know just what happened. Except that somehow — he misjudged the distances — missed his footing —"

Sally Lee looked up at Jim.

"Poor Cecil," she said. "He always got confused so easily." She dabbed her lovely eyes with her handkerchief and the Landy person looked altogether fatuous.

Jim said to her: "What did *you* do when Cecil did not return?"

Sally Lee looked blank and stopped dabbing her eyes. She said after a moment: "Well, it was like this. Katherine and Norman walked out on the porch and shouted. Pretty soon I went out too. There wasn't any light. Somebody said something about lights and Norman said he'd call the proprietor. Katherine said maybe Cecil was in the car and started across the space toward the car. Norman ran along the porch and knocked on the kitchen door, I think, and shouted something. Then — I don't know what happened. I started out toward the car and — it was very dark and I could hear people but couldn't see anything. Pretty soon I bumped into Katherine and we were all calling Cecil. It's pretty confused. I don't know what happened really. The inn-keeper was out there, too."

"Were there any lights?"

Sally Lee looked thoughtful.

"After a while," she achieved presently. "Somebody turned on the lights of the car. And the inn-keeper, I suppose, had some flashlights. And there was a light on the porch. And another up in the trees over there. That's all I can remember. Except that Katherine and I — and Miss Dare, I suppose — stood there together while they were climbing down into the ravine. And Katherine started to cry. Then they said he was dead and they were bringing — him up."

"I see," said Jim. "Does everybody agree to that — or has Miss Sully forgotten something?"

No one spoke for a moment. Then the proprietor said:

"I guess that's right."

Norman Bridges nodded.

"Exactly right, I think."

"Who finally turned on the porch light?"

Jennie stepped forward again.

"I did. He" — she looked at Norman — "pounded on the door from the porch and shouted that somebody was lost. My father" — (The cook, thought Susan parenthetically, or the inn-keeper? The latter, for the girl added definitely, "Him," and pointed to the inn-keeper) — "got some flashlights and went outdoors and the cook went too. I came in here to find out what had happened. Nobody was

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here. I went to the door and it was all dark outside except that just as I looked the car lights shone up all at once, as if somebody had just turned them on. They looked real near and I started out to see what had happened. Everybody was shouting and calling Cecil and pretty soon I saw the flashlights over beyond the Crescent and I thought about the light over there, so I ran back to the porch — the switch is right there beside the door — and turned it on."

"Lights," said Katherine suddenly, "are extremely confusing when there's such a dense fog."

Jim looked at her.

"Are these stories as you remember things, Mrs. Vandeman?"

Katherine hesitated. "I think so. I was very frightened. Terrified."

"Terrified?"

"I am always nervous about Cecil. I have cared for him so long. I — I was afraid he would become chilled, staying out in the fog so long."

"You didn't think of an accident?"

"No," said Katherine. "That is — yes, when he did not return. One's mind always flashes ahead to catastrophe."

Norman moved restively.

"Don't you think we'd better get under way," he suggested rather diffidently. "We'll just tell the coroner the truth. That's all we can do. And we — well, we had to move the body. We couldn't just leave him there."

Jim said: "You were certain that he was dead?"

Katherine choked back a gasping cry and Norman said quickly: "Certainly. There was no doubt." He turned definitely to Katherine. "Warm enough to start again, dear? I think we'd better get down to town. There's nothing we can do here."

There was a general air of assent. Landy stood up and Sally Lee began to fasten her green sweater around her throat. And Jim looked at Susan.

Susan's heart leaped to her throat and pounded there. Time to act. Time to start that inexorable process going. And it had to be started. It had been a cruel and dreadful thing; terribly cruel, terribly simple, terribly brutal. It had been even stupid. Yet its very stupidity was baffling. But for one thing it would have succeeded. And that one thing was so trivial. So little. She took a long breath. Jim's eyes glowed and urged her to speak.

But she couldn't even then until he said quite clearly — so clearly that everyone in the room stopped and turned to look.

"Tell them what you know."

It was like Jim. And there was all at once a taut line about his jaw and sparks of light in his eyes like phosphorescence in a deep-lying sea. What he really said was: "Go ahead, Susie, spill it. I'm with you." But that was only with his eyes.

She said, under that compulsion: "Katherine, you said that when you were standing at the window and Cecil left, you could see the lights of the car?"

"Yes." Katherine looked tired and angry. "Let's not talk any more,

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Susan. It doesn't help. He's dead."

"Were the lights very clear?"

"Well" — Katherine considered — "of course, the car was at an angle with the inn so that I could see only the glow of the light. No, it wasn't exactly clear. But I knew, of course, what it was."

"You said that it seemed far away."

Katherine hesitated. "Why — yes. It did seem far away."

"Did you see two lights or one?" persisted Susan.

"I didn't see any lights," said Katherine, frowning. "There was only a kind of radiance. The way the car was facing I couldn't have seen the headlights themselves, if that is what you mean."

"But you saw a radiance, close to the ground, that seemed far away and was very dim in the fog? That's really all you could swear to seeing, isn't it?"

"I suppose so. What are you getting at, Susan?"

Susan turned to the waitress. "Tell us exactly why you are so sure you saw the lights from the car."

Jennie looked shrewd. "Because," she said quickly, "the light was close to the ground."

Something had happened in that long, firelit room. Something strange had passed over it and its chill breath had touched them all. No one moved. Susan said to the inn-keeper. "When Cecil Vandeman stepped over the edge of the ravine he is supposed to have had some bottles of champagne with him. I suppose they would have dropped and been broken in the fall. Did you see anything of the kind?"

"N-no," said the inn-keeper. He looked perplexed and very worried. There was something going on here that he didn't understand. "But there may be something. We can look in the morning."

Susan felt inexpressibly tired. She said wearily: "You might look, too, for some thread. Thrown probably into the bushes somewhere."

The chill, queer thing that had entered that room became possessive, like a spell. Susan was aware that Jim slipped very gently from the table and was standing so that he faced the others and was between them and Susan. His hand was in his pocket. And Katherine said:

"What do you mean, Susan?"

"I mean," said Susan slowly, "that Cecil was murdered."

Jim said very quietly: "You are perfectly sure, Susan?"

Susan turned to Sally Lee Sully.

"Do you know," she said, "that an accessory to murder, either before or after the fact, is criminally liable?"

"Is — *what* ——"

"Can be tried for murder. That includes — concealing evidence."

There was another silent — yet packed — moment while Sally Lee considered it. Then suddenly, pale and deadly in her beauty, she whirled to Norman Bridges.

"Tried for murder!" she screamed. "I *can't* be — I *can't* be — He did it! I don't know how, but he did it!"

Confusion. Shouts. A rush of move-

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ment. Norman's wide hands closing down across Sally Lee's beautiful, treacherous mouth. Men's figures intervening, and the firelight blotted out intermittently.

"He did it," screamed Sally Lee again frantically. "That's why he threw the champagne bottles out of the car. He hated Cecil. He was jealous. He wanted me. But I had nothing to do with the murder. Nothing — nothing ——"

They were holding Norman who was struggling, and Susan said to Sally Lee: "Why do you think he wanted you?"

Above its white and selfish terror, Sally Lee's face was scornful — not of men but of Susan's ignorance. "He wanted the money too," she cried sharply. "He was going to marry Katherine."

"Why?"

"To get the money, of course."

Jim said abruptly, cutting through the confusion: "These are only accusations. You have no proof."

Sally Lee paused. An accessory — tried for murder. Concealing evidence. Her eyes glittered; nothing soft about them now, nothing languorous. She cried:

"He threw the champagne bottles, three of them, out of the car on the way down the mountain after Cecil's death. He told me not to tell. He made love to me, when Katherine didn't know. But I" — she hesitated, then plunged on: "but he could never have got me without money. I know my market, and he knew it."

In the shocked silence Katherine moved and said with a kind of groan: "That was why, Susan. That was why I needed you. There was something — I didn't know quite what. I wanted your advice."

Susan thought: Cecil first. Then Katherine. She said to Katherine: "Come, Katherine, we'll go home."

But they were not to go yet. Not before Jim had asked certain questions. Had put together logically and with conclusiveness the thing that had thrust itself with such dreadful persistence upon Susan.

"The proof," she said to Jim. "I don't know." She considered slowly. They were on the porch, cool air touching her cheek. Inside there were preparations.

"There's the electric light bulb. Fingerprints are on it."

"What bulb?"

Susan dug into that queer subterranean storehouse where all things are assembled and labeled, to emerge as conclusions.

"He turned on the car lights. We saw the glow. But Katherine and I and then Sally Lee entered the house. While the lights were on, he ran around the path and let down the light on the point. (It's on a drop-cord with the slack taken up in a loop. All he had to do was pull a string he had previously tied to the loop.) By that time we had reached the house. He turned out the car lights as he passed, leaving the light (then not burning) across the ravine. The fog was so thick that the light (when he turned it on

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as he entered the house) made only a bright glow and as it was about two feet off the ground, anybody would think, seeing that low light off in the fog, that it was the lights of a car. Particularly if that idea was fixed in one's mind. If you were told it was the light from a car. If you expected it to be that. But Katherine, you see, said it seemed far away."

"Wait. Was the light on the point beyond the ravine burning then — when you came down the mountain?"

"No. He had to let it down first. But he reached the house after we had entered it. The switch is just beside the door. He could have turned it on as he entered."

"The porch light would have been turned on too. They are on the same switch. Someone would have seen it."

"That's where his fingerprints must be. You see he had to unscrew the bulb before turning on the light. It would be very simple, the work of an instant. The whole thing is simple; it was only a matter of accomplishing promptly every step in the process at the right time. There was really only one point of danger in the whole thing."

"Wait," said Jim again, looking thoughtful. "Let's go chronologically. So far it's all clear. You are all in the house: the lights of the car are turned out but across the ravine a light is shining which, owing to the fog and distance and its being so close to the ground, looks very like the lights of a car. Now what?"

"Well — the waitress saw it and, naturally, merely registered that it was a low light; hence car lights. Remember that the fog actually changed and confused everything; and we would all make allowances for it. Also, Katherine saw that light and, fortunately from the murderer's viewpoint, saw it just as Cecil left the house."

"He left to get the champagne?"

"Yes. They'd quarrelled — Norman and Cecil had evidently talked of announcing the engagement; had planned to have dinner up here, and Norman must have suggested bringing the champagne. That was evident too. His only problem was to get Cecil to go to the car, and that wasn't a problem. Both men would offer to get the champagne. He would let Cecil go. Of course, if Cecil himself had already brought in the champagne Norman would have made some other pretext to take Cecil into the fog. The next step was simple; the only necessary thing was to do it. He waited until he knew Cecil would have reached the ravine. He had said as Cecil went out the door: 'The car lights are on,' thus fixing the idea in Cecil's mind — to go straight for the glow of light."

"But it might have failed."

"No. Not when he had succeeded with the preparations and had actually got Cecil started. Cecil was worried, upset on account of the quarrel. He was always easily confused about directions. And once really into the fog — no, it was pretty sure to succeed. But if it hadn't, he would have tried some other way."

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"It's pretty complicated," he said and reflected. "No," he said, then. "It's just a series of trivialities, nothing about it that was difficult. And — if it worked — almost proof against detection. And I can see how it would appeal to a mind accustomed to detail and acutely aware of the need to make it look like an accident." He looked at Susan thoughtfully. "Go on."

"Then — he went to the door. Casually — as if to glance out at the fog. And by doing so, had a chance to press the switch for the outside lights again. Thus when we opened the door there was no light anywhere. So what more likely than to assume what we did assume — that Cecil had reached the car, had for some reason turned out the lights and become confused starting back toward the inn. When we stood there in the darkness calling for Cecil, and Cecil didn't reply, he knew that his plan had worked. Of course, Cecil might be still alive — he couldn't know. But it was a deadly fall. It was just then Norman reached his dangerous moment. And that was to accomplish three things before the porch light and, simultaneously, the other light was turned on by somebody. He had to screw that bulb up there tight in the socket again, he had to pound on the kitchen door and shout for the inn-keeper, he had to run along the path, push the bench up to the light, climb on the back of the bench and loop up the drop-cord again so that, when the switch was turned on, the light would be high in the tree again. It was his only dangerous moment. And, of course, he had as nearly as he was able, rehearsed it."

"Rehearsed?"

"When the waitress came into the room and saw him she said, 'How do you do?' As if she recognized him. As if he'd been up here before — and recently. You can ask her in order to verify it. But I'm sure. I'm sure, too, that if you'll telephone the weather bureau they'll tell you that their real forecast was cloudy weather. Not fair, as Norman reported."

"The light," said Jim, "would have silhouetted the car."

"It's too far to one side. You can look tomorrow. The car tracks will still be there."

The door opened. They had an instant's view of people moving about and a lovely, graceful figure against the light.

"So that was the motive," said Jim.

"Yes," said Susan. "It was — I don't know — it was just there. Between them."

"It was a gamble on her selfishness," said Jim. "It was a risk." He paused. Fog swirled in and around them and, outside, it was quiet and cold. Presently he said: "Not such a gamble, perhaps. 'Oh, serpent heart, hid with a flowering face' " — he quoted absently, stopped and laughed unsteadily — "Shakespeare said everything. Get into the car, Sue. I'll — see to the rest."

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The Adventure of
THE TELLTALE BOTTLE

by ELLERY QUEEN

Now regarding this folksy fable, this almost-myth, this canard upon history," continued Ellery, "what are the facts? The facts, my dear Nikki, are these:

"It was *not* a good harvest. Oh, they had twenty acres planted to seed corn, but may I remind you that the corn had been pilfered from the Cape Indians? And had it not been for Tisquantum —"

"Tis-who?" asked Inspector Queen feebly.

"— corruptly known as Squanto — there would have been no harvest that year at all. For it took the last of the more-or-less noble Patuxet to teach our bewildered forefathers how to plant it properly."

"Well, you can't deny they decreed *some* sort of holiday," flashed Nikki, "so that they might 'rejoyce' together!"

"I have no desire to distort the facts," replied Ellery with dignity. "To the contrary. They had excellent reason to 'rejoyce' — some of them were still alive. And tell me: Who actually participated in that first American festival?"

"Why, the Pilgrims," said Inspector Queen uneasily.

"And I suppose you'll tell me that as they stuffed themselves with all the traditional goodies other revered forefathers came running out of the woods with arrows through their hats?"

"I remember a picture like that in my grade-school history book — yes," said Nikki defiantly.

"The *fact* is," grinned Ellery, "they were on such good terms with the Indians during that fall of 1621 that the most enthusiastic celebrants at the feast were Massasoit of the Wampanoag and ninety of his braves! — all very hungry, too. And tell me this: What was the menu on that historic occasion?"

"Turkey!"

"Cranberry sauce!"

"Pumpkin pie!"

"And — and so forth," concluded the Inspector. He was at home that day receiving Madame La Grippe and he had been — until Ellery unleashed his eloquence — the most ungracious host in New York. But now he was neglecting Madame beautifully.

"I accept merely the and-so-forths," said Ellery indulgently. "If they had 'Turkies' at that feast, there is no mention of them in the record. Yes, there were plenty of cranberries in the bogs — but it is more than doubtful that the Pilgrim ladies knew what to do with them. And we can definitely assert that the pastry possibilities of

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the Narraganset *askútasquash* were not yet dreamed of by the pale green females who had crept off the *Mayflower.*"

"Listen to him," said the Inspector comfortably.

"I suppose," said Nikki, grinding her teeth, "I suppose they just sat there and munched on that old corn."

"By no means. The menu was regal, considering their customary diet of wormy meal. They gorged themselves on eels —"

"*Eels!*"

"And clams, venison, water-fowl, and so on. For dessert — wild plums and dried berries; and — let's face it — wild grape wine throughout," said Ellery, looking sad. "And — oh, yes. How long did this first thanks-giving celebration last?"

"Thanksgiving Day? How long would a day *be?* A day!"

"Three days. And why do we celebrate Thanksgiving in the month of November?"

"Because — because —"

"Because the Pilgrims celebrated it in the month of October," concluded Ellery. "And there you have it, Nikki — the whole sordid record of historical misrepresentation, simply another example of our national vainglory. I say, if we must celebrate Thanksgiving, let us give thanks to the red man, whose land we took away. I say — let us have facts!"

"And *I* say," cried Nikki, "that you're a factual show-off, a — a darned old talking encyclopedia, Ellery Queen, and I don't care what your precious 'facts' are because all I wanted to do was take Thanksgiving baskets of turkeys and cranberries and stuff to those people down on the East Side that I take baskets to every year because they're too poor to have decent Thanksgiving dinners tomorrow and especially this year with prices sky-high and so many refugee children here who ought to learn the American traditions and who's to teach them if . . . And anyway, one of them *is* an Indian — way back — so there!"

"Why, Nikki," mourned Ellery, joining Nikki on the floor where she was now hugging the carpet, in tears, "why didn't you tell me one of them is an Indian? That makes all the difference — don't you see?" He sprang erect, glowing fiercely with the spirit of Thanksgiving. "Turkeys! Cranberries! Pumpkin pies! To Mr. Sisquencchi's!"

THE AFFAIR of The Telltale Bottle was a very special sort of nastiness, culminating in that nastiest of nastinesses, murder; but it is doubtful if, even had Ellery been a lineal descendant of Mother Shipton, he would have called the bountiful excursion off or in any other wise tarnished that silvery day.

For Mr. Sisquencchi of the market around the corner made several glittering suggestions regarding the baskets; there was a lambency about Miss Porter which brightened with the afternoon; and even Manhattan shone, getting into a snowy party dress as Ellery's ancient Duesenberg

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padded patiently about the East Side.

Ellery lugged baskets and assorted packages through medieval hallways and up donjon staircases until his arm protested; but this was a revolt of the flesh only — the spirit grew fresher as they knocked on the doors of O'Keefes, Del Florios, Cohens, Wilsons, Olsens, Williamses, Pomerantzes, and Johnsons and heard the cries of various Pats, Sammies, Antonios, Olgas, Clarences, and Petunias.

"But where's the Indian?" he demanded, as they sat in the car while Nikki checked over her list. The sun was setting, and several thousand ragamuffins were crawling over the Duesenberg, but it was still a remarkable day.

"Check," said Nikki. "Orchard Street. That's the Indian, Ellery. I mean — oh, she's not an *Indian*, just has some Indian blood way back, Iroquois, I think. She's the last."

"Well, I won't quibble," frowned Ellery, easing old Duesey through the youth of America. "Although I *do* wish —"

"Oh, shut up. Mother Carey's the darlingest old lady — scrubs floors for a living."

"Mother Carey's!"

But at the Orchard Street tenement, under a canopy of ermine-trimmed fire escapes, a janitor was all they found of Ellery's Indian.

"The old hag don't live here no more."

"Oh, dear," said Nikki. "Where's she moved to?"

"She lammed outa here with all her junk in a rush the other day — search me." The janitor spat, just missing Nikki's shoe.

"Any idea where the old lady works?" asked Ellery, just missing the janitor's shoe.

The janitor hastily withdrew his foot. "I think she cleans up some frog chow joint near Canal Street regular."

"I remember!" cried Nikki. "Fouchet's, Ellery. She's worked there for years. Let's go right over there — maybe they know her new address."

"Fouchet's!" said Ellery gaily; and so infected was he by the enchantment of that fairy-tale afternoon that for once his inner voice failed him.

Fouchet's Restaurant was just off Canal Street, a few blocks from Police Headquarters — squeezed between a button factory and a ship chandler's. Cars with Brooklyn accents whished by its plate-glass front, and it looked rather frightened by it all. Inside they found round tables covered with checkered oilcloths, a wine bar, walls decorated with pre-War French travel posters, a sharp and saucy odor, and a cashier named Clothilde.

Clothilde had a large bosom, a large cameo on it, a large black-velvet ribbon in her hair; and when she opened her mouth to say: "The old woman who clean up?" Nikki saw that she also had a large gold tooth. "Ask Monsieur Fouchet. 'E will be right back." She examined Nikki with

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very sharp black eyes.

"If the Pilgrims could eat eels," Ellery was mumbling, over a menu. "Why not? *Escargots!* Nikki, let's have dinner here!"

"Well," said Nikki doubtfully. "I suppose . . . as long as we have to wait for Mr. Fouchet anyway . . ." A waiter with a long dreary face led them to a table, and Ellery and the waiter conferred warmly over the menu, but Nikki was not paying attention — she was too busy exchanging brief feminine glances with Clothilde. It was agreed: the ladies did not care for each other. Thereafter, Clothilde wore an oddly watchful expression, and Nikki looked uneasy.

"Ellery . . . " said Nikki.

"— only the very best," Ellery was pontificating. "Now where the devil did that waiter go? I hadn't got to the wine. Pierre!"

"*Un moment, Monsieur,*" came the voice of the waiter with the long dreary face.

"You know, Nikki, less than five per cent of all the wine produced in the world can be called really fine wine —"

"Ellery, I don't like this place," said Nikki.

"The rest is *pour la soif*—"

"Let's . . . not eat here after all, Ellery. Let's just find out about Mother Carey and —"

Ellery looked astonished. "Why, Nikki, I thought you loved French food. Consequently, we'll order the rarest, most exquisitely balanced, most perfectly fermented wine. — Pierre! Where the deuce has he gone? A Sauterne with body, bouquet, breeding . . ."

"Oh!" squeaked Nikki, then she looked guilty. It was only Pierre, breathing down her neck.

"After all, it's a special occasion. Ah, there you are. *La carte des vins!* No, never mind, I know what I want. Pierre," said Ellery magnificently, "a bottle of . . . *Château d'Yquem!*"

The dreary look on the waiter's face rather remarkably vanished.

"But Monsieur," he murmured, "*Château d'Yquem* . . . ? That is an expensive wine. We do not carry so fine a wine in our cellar."

And still, as Pierre said this, he contrived to give the impression that something of extraordinary importance had just occurred. Nikki glanced anxiously at Ellery to see if he had caught that strange overtone; but Ellery was merely looking crushed.

"Carried away by the spirit of Thanksgiving Eve. Very stupid of me, Pierre. Of course. Give us the best you have — which," Ellery added as Pierre walked rapidly away, "will probably turn out to be *vin ordinaire.*" And Ellery laughed.

Something is horribly wrong, thought Nikki; and she wondered how long it would take Ellery to become himself again.

IT HAPPENED immediately after the *pêches flambeaux* and the *demi-tasse.* Or, rather, two things happened. One involved the waiter. The other involved Clothilde.

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The waiter seemed confused: Upon handing Ellery *l'addition*, he simultaneously whisked a fresh napkin into Ellery's lap! This astounding *non sequitur* brought Mr. Queen to his slumbering senses. But he made no remark, merely felt the napkin and, finding something hard and flat concealed in its folds, he extracted it without looking at it and slipped it into his pocket.

As for the cashier, she too seemed confused. In payment of *l'addition*, Ellery tossed a twenty-dollar bill on the desk. Clothilde made change, chattering pleasantly all the while about *Monsieur* and *Mad'moiselle* and 'ow did they like the dinner? — and she made change very badly. She was ten dollars short.

Ellery had just pointed out this deplorable unfamiliarity with the American coinage system when a stout little whirlwind arrived, scattering French before him like leaves.

"*Mais Monsieur Fouchet, je fais une méprise . . .*"

"*Bête à manger du foin — silence!*" And M. Fouchet fell upon Ellery, almost weeping. "*Monieur*, this 'as never 'appen before. I give you my assurance —"

For a chilled moment Nikki thought Ellery was going to produce what lay in his pocket for M. Fouchet's inspection. But Ellery merely smiled and accepted the missing ten-dollar bill graciously and asked for Mother Carey's address. M. Fouchet threw up his hands and ran to the rear of the restaurant and ran back to press an oil-stained scrawl upon them, chattering in French at Ellery, at Nikki, at his cashier; and then they were on the street and making for the Duesenberg in a great show of post-prandial content . . . for through the plate glass M. Fouchet, and Clothilde, and — yes — Pierre of the long face were watching them closely.

"Ellery, what . . . ?"

"Not now, Nikki. Get into the car."

Nikki kept glancing nervously at the three Gallic faces as Ellery tried to start the Duesenberg. "Huh?"

"I said it won't start, blast it. Battery." Ellery jumped out into the snow and began tugging at the basket. "Grab those other things and get out, Nikki."

"But —"

"Cab!" A taxicab parked a few yards beyond Fouchet's shot forward. "Driver, get this basket and stuff in there beside you, will you? Nikki, hop to it. Get into the cab!"

"You're leaving the *car?*"

"We can pick it up later. What are you waiting for, driver?"

The driver looked weary. "Ain't you startin' your Thanksgivin' celebratin' a little premature?" he asked. "I ain't no fortune-teller. Where do I go?"

"Oh. That slip Fouchet gave me. Nikki, where . . . ? Here! 214-B Henry Street, cab. The East Side."

The cab slid away. "Wanna draw me diagrams?" muttered the driver.

"Now, Nikki. Let's have a look at Pierre's little gift."

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It was a stiff white-paper packet. Ellery unfolded it.

It contained a large quantity of a powdery substance — a white crystalline powder.

"Looks like snow," giggled Nikki. "What is it?"

"That's what it is."

"*Snow?*"

"Cocaine."

THAT'S THE HELL of this town," the cab driver was remarking. "Anything can happen. I remember once —"

"Apparently, Nikki," said Ellery with a frown, "I gave Pierre some password or other. By accident."

"He thought you're an addict! That means Fouchet's is — "

"A depot for the distribution of narcotics. I wonder what I said that made Pierre . . . *The wine!*"

"I don't follow you," complained the driver.

Ellery glared. The driver looked hurt and honked at an elderly Chinese in a black straw hat.

"*Château d'Yquem*, Nikki. That was the password! Pearls in a swinery . . . of course, of course."

"I *knew* something was wrong the minute we walked in there, Ellery."

"Mmm. We'll drop this truck at Mrs. Carey's, then we'll shoot back uptown and get dad working on this Fouchet nastiness."

"Watch the Inspector snap out of that cold," laughed Nikki; then she stopped laughing. "Ellery . . . do you suppose all this has anything to do with Mother Carey?"

"Oh, nonsense, Nikki."

It was a bad day for the old master.

FOR WHEN THEY got to 214-B Henry Street and knocked on the door of Apartment 3-A and a voice as shaky as the stairs called out, "Who's there?" and Nikki identified herself . . . something happened. There were certain sounds. Strange rumbly, sliding sounds. The door was not opened at once.

Nikki bit her lip, glancing timidly at Ellery. Ellery was frowning.

"She don't act any too anxious to snag this turk-bird," said the cab driver, who had carried up the pumpkin pie and the bottle of California wine which had been one of Mr. Sisquencchi's inspirations, while Nikki took odds and ends and Ellery the noble basket. "My old lady'd be tickled to death —"

"I'd rather it were you," said Ellery violently. "When she opens the door, dump the pie and wine inside, then wait for us in the cab —"

But at that instant the door opened, and a chubby little old woman with knobby forearms and flushed cheeks stood there, looking not even remotely like an Indian.

"Miss Porter!"

"Mother Carey."

It was a poor little room with an odor. Not the odor of poverty; the room was savagely clean. Ellery barely listened to the chirrupings of the two women; he was too busy using his eyes and his nose. He seemed to have forgotten Massasoit and the Wampanoag.

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When they were back in the cab, he said abruptly: "Nikki, do you happen to recall Mother Carey's old apartment?"

"The one on Orchard Street? Yes — why?"

"How many rooms did she have there?"

"Two. A bedroom and a kitchen. Why?"

Ellery asked casually: "Did she always live alone?"

"I think so."

"Then why has she suddenly — so very suddenly, according to that Orchard Street janitor — moved to a *three*-room flat?"

"You mean the Henry Street place has —?"

"Three rooms — from the doors. Now why would a poor old scrubwoman living alone suddenly need an *extra* room?"

"Cinch," said the cab driver. "She's takin' in boarders."

"Yes," murmured Ellery, without umbrage. "Yes, I suppose that might account for the odor of cheap cigar smoke."

"Cigar smoke!"

"Maybe she's runnin' a horse parlor," suggested the driver.

"Look, friend," said Nikki angrily, "how about letting us take the wheel and you coming back here?"

"Keep your bra on, lady."

"The fact is," mused Ellery, "before she opened her door she moved furniture away from it. Those sounds? She'd barricaded that door, Nikki."

"Yes," said Nikki in a small voice. "And that doesn't sound like a boarder, does it?"

"It sounds," said Ellery, "like a hideout." He leaned forward just as the driver opened his mouth. "And don't bother," he said. "Nikki, it's somebody who can't go out — or doesn't dare to . . . I'm beginning to think there's a connection between the cigar-smoker your Mrs. Carey's hiding, and the packet of drugs Pierre slipped me at Fouchet's by mistake."

"Oh, no, Ellery," moaned Nikki.

Ellery took her hand. "It's a rotten way to wind up a heavenly day, honey, but we have no choice. I'll have dad give orders to arrest Pierre tonight the minute we get home, and let's hope . . . Hang the Pilgrims!"

"That's subversive propaganda, brother," said the driver. Ellery shut the communicating window, violently.

INSPECTOR QUEEN SNIFFLED: "She's in it, all right."

"Mother Carey?" wailed Nikki.

"Three years ago," nodded the Inspector, drawing his bathrobe closer about him, "Fouchet's was mixed up in a drug-peddling case. And a Mrs. Carey was connected with it."

Nikki began to cry.

"Connected how, dad?"

"One of Fouchet's waiters was the passer —"

"Pierre?"

"No. Pierre was working there at that time — or at least a waiter of that name was — but the guilty waiter was an old man named Carey . . . whose wife was a scrubwoman."

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"Lo the poor Indian," said Ellery, and he sat down with his pipe. After a moment, he said: "Where's Carey now, dad?"

"In the clink doing a tenner. We found a couple of hundred dollars' worth of snow in the old geezer's bedroom — they lived on Mulberry then. Carey claimed he was framed — but they all do."

"And Fouchet?" murmured Ellery, puffing.

"Came out okay. Apparently he hadn't known. It was Carey all by himself."

"Strange. It's still going on."

The Inspector looked startled, and Ellery shrugged.

Nikki cried: "Mr. Carey was *framed!*"

"Could be," muttered the old gentleman. "Might have been this Pierre all the time — felt the heat on and gave us a quick decoy. Nikki, hand me the phone."

"I knew it, I knew it!"

"And while you're on the phone, dad," said Ellery mildly, "you might ask why Headquarters hasn't picked up Carey."

"Picked him up? I told you, Ellery, he's in stir. Hello?"

"Oh, no, he's not," said Ellery. "He's hiding out in Apartment 3-A at 214-B Henry Street."

"The cigar smoke," breathed Nikki. "The barricade. The extra room!"

"Velie!" snarled the Inspector. "Has a con named Frank Carey broken out of stir?"

Sergeant Velie, bewildered by this clairvoyance, stammered: "Yeah, Inspector, few days ago, ain't been picked up yet, we're tryin' to locate his wife but she's moved and — But you been home sick!"

"She's moved," sighed the Inspector. "Well, well, she's probably moved to China." Then he roared: "She's hiding him out! But never mind — you take those Number Fourteens of yours right down to Fouchet's Restaurant just off Canal and arrest a waiter named Pierre! And if he isn't there, don't take two weeks finding out where he lives. I want that man tonight!"

"But Carey —"

"I'll take care of Carey myself. Go on — don't waste a second!" The old man hung up, fuming. "Where's my pants, dad blast the —?"

"Dad!" Ellery grabbed him. "You're not going out *now.* You're still sick."

"I'm picking up Carey personally," said his father gently. "Do you think you're man enough to stop me?"

THE OLD SCRUBWOMAN sat at her kitchen table stolidly, and this time the Iroquois showed.

There was no one else in the Henry Street flat.

"We know your husband was here, Mrs. Carey," said Inspector Queen. "He got word to you when he broke out of jail, you moved, and you've been hiding him here. Where's he gone to now?"

The old lady said nothing.

"Mother Carey, please," said Nikki.

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"We want to help you."

"We believe your husband was innocent of that drug-passing charge, Mrs. Carey," said Ellery quietly.

The bluish lips tightened. The basket, the turkey, the pumpkin pie, the bottle of wine, the packages were still on the table.

"I think, dad," said Ellery, "Mrs. Carey wants a bit more evidence of official good faith. Mother, suppose I tell you I not only believe your husband was framed three years ago, but that the one who framed him was —"

"That Pierre," said Mother Carey in a hard voice. "He was the one. He was the brains. He used to be 'friendly' with Frank."

"The one — but not the brains."

"What d'ye mean, Ellery?" demanded Inspector Queen.

"Isn't Pierre working alone?" asked Nikki.

"If he is, would he have handed me — a total stranger — a packet of dope worth several hundred dollars . . . without a single word about payment?" asked Ellery dryly.

Mother Carey was staring up at him.

"*Those were Pierre's instructions,*" said the Inspector slowly.

"Exactly. So there's someone behind Pierre's who's using him as the passer, payment being arranged for by some other means —"

"Probably in advance!" The Inspector leaned forward. "Well, Mrs. Carey, won't you talk now? Where is Frank?"

"Tell the Inspector, Mother," begged Nikki. "The truth!"

Mother Carey looked uncertain. But then she said: "We told the truth three years ago," and folded her lacerated hands.

There is a strength in the oppressed which yields to nothing.

"Let it go," sighed the Inspector. "Come on, son — we'll go over to Fouchet's and have a little chin with Mr. Pierre, find out who his bossman is —"

And it was then that Mother Carey said, in a frightened quick voice: "No!" and put her hand to her mouth, appalled.

"Carey's gone to Fouchet's," said Ellery slowly. "Of course, Mrs. Carey would have a key — she probably opens the restaurant. Carey's gone over with some desperate idea that he can dig up some evidence that will clear him. That's it, Mother, isn't it?"

But Inspector Queen was already out in the unsavory hall.

SERGEANT VELIE was standing miserably in the entrance to Fouchet's when the squad car raced up.

"Now Inspector, don't get mad —"

The Inspector said benignly: "You let Pierre get away."

"Oh, no!" said Sergeant Velie. "Pierre's in there, Inspector. Only he's dead."

"*Dead!*"

"Dead of what, Sergeant?" asked Ellery swiftly.

"Of a carvin' knife in the chest,

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that's of what, Maestro. We came right over here like you said, Inspector, only some knife artist beat us to it." The Sergeant relaxed. It was all right. The Old Man was smiling.

"Frank Carey did it, of course?"

The Sergeant stopped relaxing. "Heck, no, Inspector. Carey didn't do it."

"Velie —!"

"Well, he didn't! When we rolled up we spot Carey right here at the front door. Place is closed for the night — just a night-light. He's got a key. We watch him unlock the door, go in, and wham! he damn' near falls over this Pierre. So the feeble-minded old cluck bends down and takes the knife out of Pierre's chest and stands there in a trance, lookin' at it. He's been standin' like that ever since."

"Without the knife, I hope," said the Inspector nastily; and they went in.

And found an old man among the detectives in the posture of a question-mark leaning against an oilcloth-covered table under a poster advertising Provençal, with his toothless mouth ajar and his watery old eyes fixed on the extinct *garçon*. The extinct *garçon* was still in his monkey-suit; his right palm was upturned, as if appealing for mercy, or the usual *pourboire*.

"Carey," said Inspector Queen.

Old man Carey did not seem to hear. He was fascinated by Ellery; Ellery was on one knee, peering at Pierre's eyes.

"Carey, who killed this Frenchman?"

Carey did not reply.

"Plain case of busted gut," remarked Sergeant Velie.

"You can hardly blame him!" cried Nikki. "Framed for dope-peddling three years ago, convicted, jailed for it — and now he thinks he's being framed for murder!"

"I wish we could get something out of him," said the Inspector thoughtfully. "It's a cinch Pierre stayed after closing time because he had a date with somebody."

"His boss!" said Nikki.

"Whoever he's been passing the snow for, Nikki."

"Dad." Ellery was on his feet, looking down at the long dreary face that now seemed longer and drearier. "Do you recall if Pierre was ticketed as a drug addict three years ago?"

"I don't think he was." The Inspector looked surprised.

"Look at his eyes."

"Say!"

"Far gone, too. If Pierre wasn't an addict at the time of Carey's arrest, he'd taken to the habit in the past three years. And that explains why he was murdered tonight."

"He got dangerous," said the Inspector grimly. "With Carey loose and Pierre pulling that boner with you tonight, the boss knew the whole Fouchet investigation would be reopened."

Ellery nodded. "Felt he couldn't trust Pierre any longer. Weakened by drugs, the fellow would talk as soon as the police pulled him in, and this mysterious character knew it."

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"Yeah," said the Sergeant sagely. "Put the heat on a smecker and he squirts like whipped cream."

But Ellery wasn't listening. He had sat down at one of the silent tables and was staring over at the wine-bar.

M. FOUCHET FLEW in in a strong tweed overcoat, showing a dent in his Homburg where it should not have been.

"Selling of the dope — again! This *Pierre* . . . !" hissed M. Fouchet, and he glared down at his late waiter with quite remarkable venom.

"Know anything about this job, Fouchet?" asked the Inspector courteously.

"Nothing, *Monsieur l'inspecteur*, I give you my word, no thing. Pierre stay late tonight. He says to me he will fix up the tables for tomorrow. He stays and — pfft! *il se fait tuer!*" M. Fouchet's fat lips began to dance. "Now the bank will give me no more credit." He sank into a chair.

"Oh? You're not in good shape financially, Fouchet?"

"I serve *escargots* near Canal Street. It should be pretzels! The bank, I owe 'im five thousand dollar."

"And that's the way it goes," said the Inspector sympathetically. "All right, Mr. Fouchet, go home. Where's that cashier?"

A detective pushed Clothilde forward. Clothilde had been weeping into her make-up. But not now. Now she glared down at Pierre quite as M. Fouchet had glared. Pierre glared back.

"Clothilde?" muttered Ellery, suddenly coming out of deep reverie.

"Velie turned up something," whispered the Inspector.

"She's in it. She's got something to do with it," Nikki said excitedly to Ellery. "I knew it!"

"Clothilde," said the Inspector, "how much do you make in this restaurant?"

"Twenty-five dollar a week."

Sergeant Velie drawled: "How much dough you got in the bank, Mademazelle?"

Clothilde glanced at the behemoth very quickly indeed. Then she began to sniffle, shaking in several places. "I 'ave no money in the bank. Oh, may be a few dollar —"

"This is your bank book, isn't it, Clothilde?" asked the Inspector.

Clothilde stopped sniffling just as quickly as she had begun. "Where do you get that? Give it to me!"

"Uh-uh-uh," said the Sergeant, embracing her. "Say . . . !"

She flung his arm off. "That is my bank book!"

"And it shows," murmured the Inspector, "deposits totaling more than seventeen thousand dollars, Clothilde. Rich uncle?"

"*Voleurs!* That is my money! I save!"

"She's got a new savings system, Inspector," explained the Sergeant. "Out of twenty-five bucks per week, she manages to sock away, some weeks, sixty, some weeks eighty-five . . . It's wonderful. How do you do it, Cloey?"

Nikki glanced at Ellery, startled.

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He nodded gloomily.

"*Fils de lapin! Jongleur! Chien-loup!*" Clothilde was screaming. "All right! Some time I short-change the customer. I am cashier, *non?* But — nothing else!" She jabbed her elbow into Sergeant Velie's stomach. "And take your 'and off me!"

"I got my duty, Mademazelle," said the Sergeant, but he looked a little guilty. Inspector Queen said something to him in an undertone, and the Sergeant reddened, and Clothilde came at him claws first, and detectives jumped in, and in the midst of it Ellery got up from the table and drew his father aside and said: "Come on back to Mother Carey's."

"What for, Ellery? I'm not through here —"

"I want to wash this thing up. Tomorrow's Thanksgiving, poor Nikki is out on her feet —"

"*Ellery,*" said Nikki.

He nodded, still gloomily.

THE SIGHT OF his wife turned old man Carey into a human being again, and he clung to her and blubbered that he had done nothing and they were trying to frame him for the second time only this time it was the hot seat they were steering him into. And Mrs. Carey kept nodding and picking lint off his jacket collar. And Nikki tried to look invisible.

"Where's Velie?" grumbled the Inspector. He seemed irritated by Carey's blubbering and the fact that Ellery had insisted on sending all the detectives home, as if this were a piece of business too delicate for the boys' sensibilities.

"I've sent Velie on an errand," Ellery replied, and then he said: "Mr. and Mrs. Carey, would you go into that room there and shut the door?" Mother Carey took her husband by the hand without a word. And when the door had closed behind them, Ellery said abruptly: "Dad, I asked you to arrest Pierre tonight. You phoned Velie to hurry right over to Fouchet's. Velie obeyed — and found the waiter stabbed to death."

"So?"

"Police Headquarters is on Centre Street. Fouchet's is just off Canal. A few blocks apart."

"Hey?"

"Didn't it strike you as extraordinary," murmured Ellery, "that Pierre should have been murdered *so quickly?* Before Velie could negotiate those few blocks?"

"You mean this boss dope peddler struck so fast to keep his man from being arrested? We went through all that before, son."

"Hm," said Ellery. "But what did Pierre's killer have to know in order to strike so quickly tonight? Two things: That Pierre had slipped me a packet of dope by mistake this evening; and that I was intending to have Pierre pulled in *tonight.*"

"But Ellery," said Nikki with a frown, "nobody knew about either of those things except you, me, and the Inspector . . ."

"Interesting?"

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"I don't get it," growled his father. "The killer knew Pierre was going to be picked up even before Velie reached Fouchet's. He must have, because he beat Velie to it. But if only the three of us knew —"

"Exactly — then how did the killer find out?"

"I give up," said the Inspector promptly. He had discovered many years before that this was, after all, the best way.

But Nikki was young. "Someone overheard you talking it over with me and the Inspector?"

"Well, let's see, Nikki. We discussed it with dad in our apartment when we got back from Mrs. Carey's . . ."

"But nobody could have overheard *there*," said the Inspector.

"Then Ellery, you and I must have been overheard before we got to the apartment."

"Good enough, Nikki. And the only place you and I discussed the case — the only place we *could* have discussed it . . ."

"Ellery!"

"We opened the packet in the cab on our way over to Henry Street here," nodded Ellery, "and we discussed its contents quite openly — in the cab. In fact," he added dryly, "if you'll recall, Nikki, our conversational cab driver joined our discussion with enthusiasm."

"*The cab driver, by joe,*" said Inspector Queen softly.

WHOM WE HAD picked up just outside Fouchet's, dad, where he was parked. It fits."

"The cab driver," repeated Nikki, looking dazed.

"The same cab driver," Ellery went on glumly, "who took us back uptown from here, Nikki — remember? And it was on that uptown trip that I told you I was going to have dad arrest Pierre tonight . . . Yes, the cab driver, and only the cab driver — the only outsider who could have overheard the two statements which would make the boss dope peddler kill his passer quickly to prevent an arrest, a police grilling, and an almost certain revelation of the boss's identity."

"Works a cab," muttered the Inspector. "Cute dodge. Parks outside his headquarters. Probably hacks his customers to Fouchet's and collects beforehand. Let Pierre pass the white stuff afterward. Probably carted them away." He looked up, beaming. "Great work, son! I'll nail that hack so blasted fast —"

"You'll nail whom, dad?" asked Ellery, still glum.

"The cab driver!"

"*But who is the cab driver?*"

ELLERY IS NOT proud of this incident.

"You're asking *me?*" howled his father.

Nikki was biting her lovely nails. "Ellery. I didn't even *notice* —"

"Ha, ha," said Ellery. "That's what I was afraid of."

"Do you mean to say," said Inspector Queen in a terrible voice, "that

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my son didn't read a hack police-identity card?"

"Er . . ."

"It's the LAW!"

"It's Thanksgiving Eve, dad," muttered Ellery. "Squanto — the Pilgrims — the Iroquois heritage of Mother Carey —"

"Stop driveling! Can't you give me a description?"

"Er . . ."

"No description," whispered his father. It was really the end of all things.

"Inspector, *nobody* looks at a cab driver," said Nikki brightly. "You know. A cab driver? He — he's just *there.*"

"The invisible man," said Ellery hopefully. "Chesterton?"

"Oh, so you do remember his name!"

"No, no, dad —"

"I'd know his voice," said Nikki. "If I ever heard it again."

"We'd have to catch him first, and if we caught him we'd hardly need his voice!"

"Maybe he'll come cruising back around Fouchet's."

The Inspector ejaculated one laughing bark.

"Fine thing. Know who did it — and might's well not know. Listen to me, you detective. You're going over to the Hack License Bureau with me, and you're going to look over the photo of every last cab jockey in —"

"Wait. Wait!"

Ellery flung himself at Mother Carey's vacated chair. He sat on the bias, chin propped on the heel of his hand, knitting his brows, unknitting them, knitting them again, until Nikki thought there was something wrong with his eyes. Then he shifted and repeated the process in the opposite direction. His father watched him with great suspicion. This was not Ellery tonight; it was someone else. All these gyrations . . .

Ellery leaped to his feet, kicking the chair over. "I've got it! We've got him!"

"How? What?"

"Nikki." Ellery's tone was mysterious, dramatic — let's face it, thought the old gentleman: corny. "Remember when we lugged the stuff from the cab up to Mother Carey's kitchen here? The cab driver helped us up — *carried this bottle of wine.*"

"Huh?" gaped the Inspector. Then he cried: "No, no, Nikki, don't touch it!" And he chortled over the bottle of California wine. "*Prints.* That's it, son — that's my boy! We'll just take this little old bottle of grape back to Headquarters, bring out the fingerprints, compare the prints on it with the file sets at the Hack Bureau —"

"Oh, yeah?" said the cab driver.

He was standing in the open doorway, there was a dirty handkerchief tied around his face below the eyes and his cap was pulled low, and he was pointing a Police Positive midway between father and son.

"I thought you were up to somethin' when you all came back here from Fouchet's," he sneered. "And then leavin' this door open so I could

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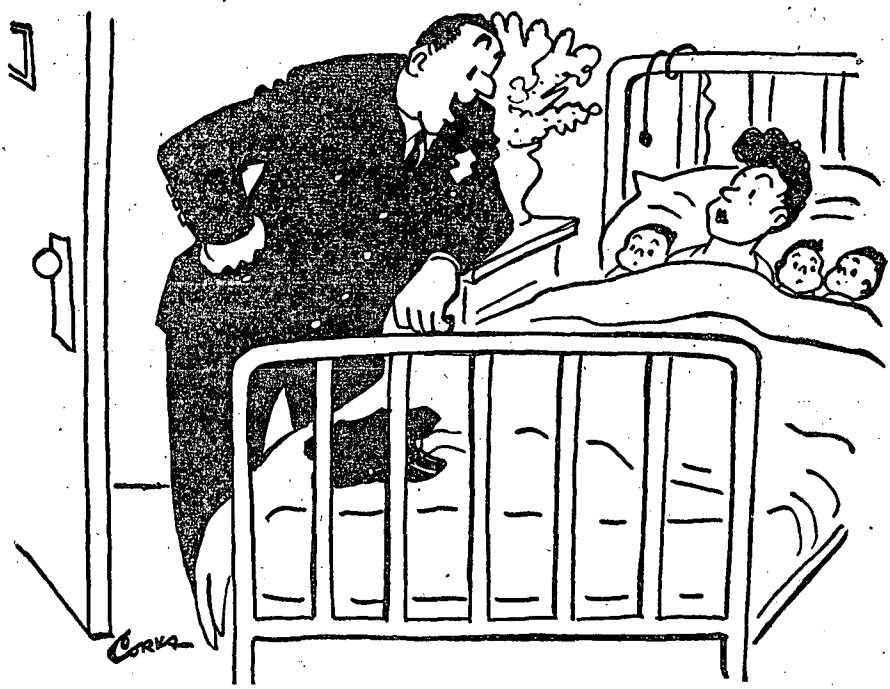
hear the whole thing. You — the old guy. Hand me that bottle of wine."

"You're not very bright," said Ellery wearily. "All right, Sergeant, shoot it out of his hand."

And Ellery embraced his father and his secretary and fell to Mother Carey's spotless floor with them as Sergeant Velie stepped into the doorway behind the cab driver and very carefully shot the gun out of the invisible man's hand.

"Happy Thanksgivin', sucker," said the Sergeant.

"Q"



"Ellery Q. Carr, Hercule P. Carr, Sherlock H. Carr— why, darling, they'll be a great hit with the boys."

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Much has been written about the differences between the American detective story and the English detective story — especially how the American type broke away, violently, from the stylized, sedate English form, and how this split in Anglo-American detectivism was not merely a matter of new approach to plot conception and characterization but also a new approach to the very manner of storytelling itself. The time has come to stop talking about these esoteric divergences and to give readers a definite for-instance. As always, the Chinese had a phrase for it: to mangle one of their old proverbs, a concrete example is worth a thousand words of critical comment. So, we now bring you a pair of stories calculated to reveal these modern differences between the American and English techniques.

We have chosen these two stories with great care, in an honest attempt to make the comparison as fair as possible. First, both stories were written by men; second, both men wrote the stories while in the armed service of their countries; third, both stories were published originally by those armed services; fourth, neither story has been reprinted; fifth, neither author is a "big name" — although we cannot resist telling you that the English author, P. Youngman-Carter, is the husband of a famous detective-story writer, no less a personage than Margery Allingham. Bear in mind, however, one unavoidable dissimilarity: the American tale emphasizes detection, the English tale emphasizes crime.

The American story, by William D. Trausch, appeared in "The Guidon," official newspaper of the Fourth United States Infantry Regiment, Fort Benning, Georgia. The English story appeared in a pocket-size magazine called "Gen," published fortnightly for the three British Services in the Middle East and Persia-Iraq Commands. Both are fine stories, in your Editor's opinion, but that is all we shall say about them. For an understanding of the differences in style and approach, we suggest that you read both stories as a double-entry and come to your own conclusions . . .

OLD SCHOOL TYPE

by P. YOUNGMAN-CARTER

MYSTERY, if you like a dramatic word, was about the best to describe Ffolliatt. His A.B. 64 gave his full name as Charles Hilary Windham Ffolliatt and added that he had once been "Independent." Even with a mouthful like that he didn't rate a lance stripe, which was one of the curious things about him. He was good-looking, able, and what is called

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"nicely spoken." By reason of these attributes he finally gravitated into the office of H.Q. Platoon.

Here he came directly under my own eagle eye, but try as I might I could discover very little about him. Obviously he had money, excellent taste, and a natural, easy manner. While he was not bone lazy, he contrived to do a bare minimum very efficiently. But that was all. He did not want a stripe and was not prepared to exert himself in that direction.

The company office consisted of a canvas lean-to at the side of a three-tonner, since we were for excellent reasons, fully mobile. Ffolliatt and I shared a table in this drafty, dusty hovel for twelve long desert months. Yet at the end of them I knew almost as little about him as at the start.

In the comparative peace which followed the second Msus Stakes the company breathed a trifle more easily and began to reorganize. We had among other surprises an intake of several warriors fresh from the Delta. The Sergeant-Major, that mighty administrator, distributed them through the platoons with an impartial pen.

To us in H.Q. fell Messrs. Williams, Walker, Waites, White and Wendon, five tired, crumpled and unexciting bodies who were thankful to be wheeled off to the cookhouse. I watched them go and ran through the list of their civil trades which lay before me.

"An undertaker, two clerks, a baker's roundsman, and a chemist," I said. "What are we going to do with this lot, Ffolliatt?"

For the first time in our association he seemed put out. "I wonder, sir," he said, "if I might ask you a favor?"

"Anything you like."

He paused and offered me one of the very expensive cigarettes he used to have sent him regularly from Cairo.

"It's about Walker," he said at last. "One of those new men. The short gingery fellow with the freckles. Probably you had no occasion to remark him, sir. Could he be transferred, say to D. Platoon?"

Now D. Platoon was detached for reasons best known to the Powers and we saw very little of them. They were supposed to have special duties and were popularly reputed to do nothing at all.

"What's wrong with this chap Walker?" I inquired. "Do you know him?"

Again Ffolliatt hesitated. "I'd hardly admit to his acquaintance," he said. "But I recognize him. A curious type. He claims — or rather claimed — to have been to a good school."

"Yours, for example?"

He smiled in his slow, easy way and took a deep puff at his cigarette. "I see I shall have to tell you about Master Walker. In confidence, of course, sir?"

I agreed.

"It's some years since I had the distinction of meeting this gentleman," he began. "But I have excellent reason to remember him, though I only saw him once. We used

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to have a Founder's Day at school. Theoretically it was in honor of the sacred memory of Edward the Confessor, but it worked out as a party for old boys. You know the kind of thing — cricket match, reunion, speeches, lots and lots of beer, pleasant green lawns, white flannels, and strawberries and cream."

He sighed. "A glorious time. One of the dormitories was turned over to a few of us who wanted to stay on late and we used to motor back to town in the morning. Great days. That was when I met Walker. He was one of the few who stayed on one occasion. He just drifted in and seemed to get pleasantly pickled along with the rest. I even remember him asking me what house I'd been in and if I knew a bloke called Guffy Randall, which was a pretty safe bet because he was expected to captain the Gentlemen that year and was one of our best and brightest. We sang and laughed and drank and swapped all the classic stories and went to sleep very late. We were pretty late in the morning, too. All except Walker, that is.

"Mr. Walker was up and away with the lark and he took with him the contents of all our pocket-books. It must have been quite a tidy sum."

"Are you sure about this?" I said. "It's a bit stiff after ten years or so."

"It was Walker right enough," said Ffolliatt. "It seems the police knew quite a bit about him. He made a specialty of Old Boys gatherings. Easy enough, I suppose. You just say you were in a different house or a different year if you're taxed. And you stay sober when others are less well-advised. I don't know if he was ever caught. I think he'd do better in D. platoon."

I was inclined to agree, although I had some difficulty in persuading the C.S.M. to see my point of view without revealing my reasons for an exchange.

To D. Platoon, however, went Walker and they promptly fulfilled H.Q.'s most dismal prophecies by seeing we got the worst of the bargain. A lazy ungrateful independent hoity-toity lot were D. Platoon, and they were asking to be straightened out.

Straightening-out, in fact, was in the air. As a result of several changes I found myself bumping along a wretched track only a week later to perform this unenviable task. D. was about as pleased to see me as I was to see them. A long period of independence had made strangers from H.Q. unwelcome.

I was made aware of unsurmountable reasons against any change and fobbed off with a multitude of minor problems. D. had dug itself in and had no intention of altering its habits.

"I wonder, sir," said the Sergeant, with a calculating eye on my notes, "if you could help one of our new chaps — Walker, his name is."

I knew that this was just a delaying action, but my curiosity to see this ingenious person was strong. He was sent in to me.

Walker's problem was really very simple. His mother was ill and he

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wanted to send her some money. Being a new man, his credits were a bit uncertain. A dozen hands had been at work on his pay book and the result was chaotic.

He stood in front of me, hopeful, worried, and puzzled. The sun had bleached his hair and intensified his freckles. A rather pathetic figure; not much like my idea of a crook.

His trouble took some time to adjust — longer, I think, than even the Sergeant had hoped. He had a wife and two children in London, but his mother lived in the country.

"At Crowshurst, sir," he said. "Near the big school, you know."

The temptation was too much.

"Do you know the school?" I asked.

"Oh, yes, sir," he said. "Very well indeed. My mother used to work there, and so did I. I was born and bred there, as you might say."

He hesitated and twisted his cap in his hands. "I don't wish to be rude, sir, but I think I recognize you. Weren't you in Mr. King's house?"

I had to admit it. The mischief was out, so I plunged on.

"I suppose you don't remember a fellow called Ffolliatt, who's now in H.Q. Platoon?"

"Ffolliatt?" he said. "No, sir. There was no one of that name there in my time. I was call-boy for the Headmaster for years and I reckon to remember everyone's name — yours for example, sir."

It was quite a relief. It meant that Ffolliatt and I shared a secret, though from rather different angles.

Thinking it over, I managed to recall him quite clearly at that old school party. We were, in fact, in the dormitory together on the fatal and scandalous occasion when the pocket-books were stolen.

But it was Ffolliatt, not Walker, who had left us at the crack of dawn.

THE KID AND THE SHADE

by WILLIAM D. TRAUSCH

IT WAS hot. You could smell the heat. The sun slapped the street and then bounced up, and when you breathed you thought you felt the hair curl in your nose. It was a scorcher.

Room 4-B was on the sunny side of the boarding house. Room 4-B was hot as hell. And dark. The shade was down, and from a hole in the shade the sun stabbed through in a blinding shaft. Just that glaring shaft through a hole in the shade — and the kid.

The kid sat on the bed. He was swinging his leg, swinging his leg. Once his knee joint cracked, and Mac, behind me, jumped.

"For God's sake," Mac said. Mac

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gets the willies when he sees a stiff.

The stiff lay on the bed beside the kid. The bed was narrow and he filled it and his three eyes were staring glassy at the dresser. The third eye was almost dead center between the other two. It was deep, and in the bottom of it I knew was a piece of lead. On the dresser lay the gun. And an iron ashtray filled with cigarette butts.

"Sonny," I said, "now tell me the story. The real one."

"I told you . . . over the phone. Cut the gab and let's get goin'."

I didn't think he was such a tough kid like he made out. Just gone astray somewhere, growing up. He was about eighteen. He looked like he had a lot to say but something was holding him back.

"Sonny," I said, "who you covering?"

"Damn you, don't call me sonny!"

"Okay, okay — don't get sore. Only you ought to be in the Infantry. They're tough too, but in a different way. Their kind of toughness might sweeten you up — if you could take it."

"His kind ain't got what it takes to be in no Infantry," Mac said.

For a minute I thought the kid was going to slug us. But he just sat there, his eyes glarin'. "I done it," he clipped through his teeth. "Like I told you over the phone."

"It'll mean the chair." I thought that might scare him.

"Yeah," he said. "Let's get goin'."

"For God's sake," Mac said. "He ain't human."

"I don't know," I said. "He only killed his brother. Or did he?"

We took the kid to headquarters and he was booked for murder. We sent the wagon out to pick up the corpse. I sent two plainclothes out to watch the building. There was more to this. I could feel it in my bones. I could see it in the kid.

"That kid's sure a cold fish," Mac said. "A born killer."

"He's hiding something," I said. "I don't think he did it."

"You got too much faith in human nature, Sam," Mac said.

In a way the kid had done us a favor. His brother was Vincent Spiroli. Vince had pulled a lot of big jobs in town. Payroll stuff. We knew, but our department couldn't pin it on him. Vince was slick.

Vince had a heart, too. A funny kind of heart. Once I saw Vince drop a wad of bills into a blind man's cup at the corner of Cedar and Sixth. That same afternoon three of his boys were found in the gutter at Cedar and Sixth. A stool reported that Vince had done a little housecleaning because three of his boys didn't like the color of his girl's hair. Vince had a funny kind of heart. But that was over now, and now the kid was booked for murder.

The kid had a record, too. Six months in reform school. A bunch of punks stole an auto. They were friends from the kid's neighborhood. They picked up the kid and went for a ride. The kid was caught with the rest.

I felt for the kid. He didn't seem so

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bad — just gone astray. I knew what a neighborhood like the kid's was. I grew up in one. And but for the grace of God and Officer O'Toole who had that beat I might have grown up just like Vince.

I used to walk the beat with O'Toole and he'd talk and set me right on a lot of things when I was a punk. Maybe that's why I became a cop. I owe a lot to O'Toole. I guess that's why I've got a soft spot for tough neighborhoods and the kids in them. The kid was eighteen and his name was Anthony Spiroli.

I walked down to the kid's cell.

"Here's some smokes, Tony," I said. I dropped a carton on the cot.

The kid's eyes looked grateful when I called him by name. Then the gray in them grew hard and he looked at the smokes.

"You trying to buy me, copper? And listen — that crack about the Army . . . I didn't like it, see? I been to the Army. And it didn't take no Pearl Harbor to make me go. The Doc just don't like the picture of my insides. I want you to get that, copper — straight."

"Tony," I said, "don't try to be such a tough guy and you'll get along all around. And I ain't buyin' you. I just don't like to see you burn for something you didn't do."

"I ain't covering nobody, copper."

"Don't call me copper, Tony. My name's Sam. Call me Sam, Tony."

"You get the hell out of here!" The kid's face was white and he was trembling.

"Okay, Tony. I get it. Loyal to the mob even if it means your neck."

That was in my mind about the kid right from the start. And now I could see it hit home. The kid's jawbone made a tight, white line, and I could see his eyes hating me all to hell. The kid was proud as a peacock, all right. But it was a twisted kind of pride.

I went back to room 4-B. The fourth day of the August scorcher was still on. One of the plainclothes was looking at magazines in a store window across the street. The other was standing under an awning in front of the building. A block away two M.P.'s were sitting in a jeep in front of an Army Field Office. But the Military weren't in on this job. This was strictly hush. And our department's special baby.

"You could fry an egg on the street," the plainclothes said as I walked by the awning.

"Yeah," I said. But I was thinking of Tony frying for something I was sure he didn't do — almost sure.

Room 4-B was the same. Except Vince was now on a slab in the morgue. The gun was at headquarters. Both Vince's and the kid's prints had been on it. Still, I felt something queer in that room. The heat, mostly.

And that blinding shaft of light cutting through the hole in the shade like a wicked, staring eye.

I examined the dresser where we found the gun. The ashtray was still on it. I walked across the room to the narrow bed. A pile of magazines lay

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on the floor beside the bed. A reading lamp stood next to the pillow. I could make nothing out of this at all. And then I heard steps coming up the hall outside.

They sounded sharp like they were cut by a woman's high heels. They were coming at room 4-B. I made for the closet. I closed the door down to a crack and kept my eye on that crack.

It was a woman, all right. And right away I didn't like the color of her hair. She looked like a blonde who had decided to become a red head and had landed somewhere in between. Some of her hair cropped out from under her hat and it was pinkish. I recognized her — it was Vince's jane.

I could see the flash of her white-gloved hands through the crack in the closet door. She looked around the room and smiled like she was pleased about something. Then she turned and walked out. I waited until I heard her footsteps going down the hall. Then I walked to the window. The window looked down four stories to the street. There was a deep, narrow balcony below the window. I looked out through the hole in the shade over the solid yellow brick wall of the balcony and I couldn't see a damn thing. The sun hit me and everything was diffused and hazy.

I lifted the corner of the shade. The lower frame of the window was open. I could see good here even in the blazing sun. I saw the jane walk out of the building to a flashy car. The plainclothes under the awning edged out and walked to the end of the block. A cab was parked there on the corner. The plainclothes got in and the cab swung away from the curb. The cab tailed the jane's flashy car. I dropped the shade and then from the balcony floor a flash of white caught the corner of my eye.

I lifted the shade again and crawled through the open window and dropped down on the balcony. The white flash that had caught my eye was a trampled cigarette butt. I shoved it into my pocket. I started to grab the sill again when I noticed the smudge of fingerprints in the dust on the sill. Right then things began to add up in my mind about that kid.

I crawled back through the window on the far side of those smudged fingerprints and walked to the dresser. There were two brands of cigarettes, Plains and Rolls, snubbed out in that ashtray. One of those brands was the same as the butt in my pocket — a Plains.

I waited till the plainclothes returned. "She drove out to the Benson Steel Pipe & Casing Co.," the plainclothes said. "She parked two streets away from the plant. After a half-hour a mugg walked to the car with a lunch bucket under his arm. The mugg got in and they drove to town. I lost them in the traffic."

I left the building. Out on the street I looked up at that shaded window. From this angle the yellow brick balcony covered nearly half of the window frame. There was even a dwarf's-head gargoyle jutting out about a foot from the top of the bal-

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cony. This must have been a classy neighborhood once, I thought.

Mac had fished out a complete record of the kid from the juvenile court. The records showed that the kid worked in a diner as a counterman. That seemed to fit. But I wanted to be sure. I reached for the phone.

"Yeah," said the voice at the other end of the wire, "yeah, Anthony Spiroli works here. . . . Uh, huh, the day shift — 10 A.M. to 7 P.M. . . . yeah, that's right, Mister."

I hung up. I sent a boy from the fingerprint department out to room 4-B to get those prints on the window sill. I went down to the properties room and looked over the pocket trash we had found on Vince. I found what I wanted — a crumpled, half-filled package of Plains cigarettes. I walked back to the office and found Mac.

"Vince's boys will be at Benson's tomorrow," I said. "Put a squad of picked men out there. Plant Bailey and Mullholan inside the office with tommies. Put Gay and Saunders —"

"Riley, the heat's got you bad," Mac interrupted.

"The real heat's on, starting now," I said.

"Riley, what are you talking about? The boys won't pull a job without Vince. And Vince is in the morgue."

"Vince might have planned this job for the mob, maybe. But he wasn't in on it. He was working another job in room 4-B."

"For God's sake, Sam — even if it's true — do you think Vince's boys are dumb? Do you think they'd pull a trick the day after their boss is murdered? They read, Sam — the papers —"

"You read anything about Vince in the papers?" I said.

"I ain't seen a paper. I've been checking on that cold fish kid."

"And you won't read a word about Vince in the papers until this job is pulled, either," I said. "The morgue has orders to hush-hush and Vince is in a special cooler."

"Sam, I tell you you're crazy with the heat!"

"Maybe. Maybe not. Now, you listen: one of Vince's boys is on Benson's payroll. Benson is working on Government contract. They turn out gun barrels now. The plant is working full hands. They've a big payroll. Look up Benson's pay day, Mac."

Mac turned to the file. Since the wave of payroll holdups we kept a record of the pay days of the big outfits. Our department sent men out on those days. It helped.

"Benson's pay off the second and fourth Tuesday of the month," Mac said.

"Yeah," I said. "And tomorrow is the second Tuesday in August. That spotter has cased the plant and tomorrow they'll pull it."

Mac looked like he half-believed me. "This got anything to do with that kid?" he asked suspiciously.

"It's got everything to do with the kid."

"For God's sake!" Mac exploded.

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"I might have known you were playing a wild hunch!"

"It's a pretty good hunch, Mac," I said. "That kid wants to talk but something is holding him back. The payroll job must be it. That's the code of the mob, Mac. I know. I know the kid's neighborhood. I know the code. The kid ain't a squealer. He ain't such a bad kid, Mac."

"He's a cold fish," Mac said. "A born killer." Mac looked at me disgusted. "You better be right, Sam, 'cause I can see the newspaper boys riding you. I can see this department the scapegoat of the force — and I can see it in print."

I went back to Tony's cell. He was smoking a cigarette. I liked that.

"Tony," I said, "you don't have to talk if you don't want to. I just got a few questions — like about you and your job at the diner?"

"I'll hear the questions first," Tony said. He didn't seem so tough and bitter now. He must have been thinking things over. I think he liked me bringing him those smokes.

"You work days and sleep nights, don't you, Tony?"

"Yeah."

"Don't that light shining through that hole in the shade in your room bother you mornings?"

"What the hell is this, copper?"

"Call me Sam, Tony. You don't have to talk if you don't want to. I just got a few questions, Tony."

"The light don't hurt. I sleep on my side."

"With your back to the shade?"

"Yeah. Then the light don't get in my eyes."

"Why don't you plug that hole in the shade, Tony?"

"I told you it don't bother me. I don't rent a room to fix shades for the landlord."

"But you didn't sleep today, Tony?"

"Today was my day off. I play poker with the boys uptown on my day off."

"Vince uses your room?"

"Vince has a key. When I'm not in he uses my room."

"Vince was in your bed when you went to your room today?"

"Yeah."

"Was the shade down, Tony?"

"The shade was down. I changed a shirt and went uptown."

"Was the window open from the bottom, Tony?"

"Yeah. The window was open from the bottom like I left it. I been keeping it open like that account of the heat."

"Tony, you read in bed?"

He looked kind of foolish, then. "Detective magazines," he admitted.

"They ain't bad reading, Tony," I said. "Look, Tony — them cigarettes I brought you. Them your brand?"

"Yeah. I smoke Rolls steady."

"The rest is like you told me over the phone, huh?"

"That's right. When I came back to the room for an extra five bucks to stick in that poker game, Vince was grouchy. The heat, I guess. We got into an argument about the war. I

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grabbed his gun off the dresser and drilled him."

"Yeah, that's just like you told me. Tony, you got a girl comes up to your room?"

He shut up like a clam and I could see his eyes hating me.

Vince's boys pulled it next day. They aimed at the heavy pay-off on the night trick. The pink-haired jane bossed the job but our boys surprised her plenty. It was over by 10 P.M. Benson's still got their $100,000 payroll; but we lost Bailey.

Sig Morelli done it. Sig Morelli is a yellow bastard. The boys couldn't get to Morelli. He was inside a truck with a tommy. He kept the tommy on Bailey for a long time. He nailed Bailey right to the dock. When he seen the mob was through, he crawled from the truck with his hands up.

"Don't shoot, don't shoot," he was blubbering.

The boys had to take him alive. Morelli is a yellow bastard.

In the squad car Mullholan bawled like a kid. Bailey was Mullholan's pal. Mullholan bawled like a kid and kicked Morelli in the face. Mac let him get in another lick and then made him sit up in front.

Sig's in a cell now, and so are the rest of Vince's boys. The pink-haired queen is with them. I thought the kid would like to hear about her.

He tore into me like a wildcat. I had to sit on him. I had to carry him down to the jane's cell so he could see for himself. In the office he looked sick.

"She said she was leaving Vince and the mob. Soon as she got a chance. She said she wasn't working no more jobs. She said we'd run away where Vince couldn't find us and we'd get married."

"Tony," I said, "you're just a kid. You got a lot to learn about women. Especially pink-haired janes. Now go get some sleep. You got a job to go to tomorrow."

"For God's sake!" Mac exploded. "You ain't turnin' that kid killer loose?"

"Mac," I said, "you come with me to room 4-B."

It was nearly midnight but room 4-B was hot as hell. I switched on the reading lamp beside the bed. Mac was wearing a nice new panama. I lifted it from his head and laid it on the bed on top the pillow. The light from the lamp streamed down on it.

I walked to the window and opened it halfway from the bottom. I pulled out my service revolver and crawled over the sill and dropped down on the balcony, and Mac looked at me like I was nuts.

I reached in and pulled down the shade. The light streamed through that hole just level with my shoulder. I shoved the barrel of my gun through the hole and over the top of it I saw Mac's hat big as life. I pulled the trigger and in the band of Mac's nice panama appeared a hole.

I crawled back into the room. "That," I said, "is the job that kept Vince from the payroll holdup."

"That kid," Mac said. "That cold

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fish killing kid. He had it all planned."

"Vince," I said. "This kept Vince from the payroll job. The pink-haired jane tipped her hand on that, driving out to Benson's yesterday. She came here looking for the kid. She was stringing the kid. The kid is young and he liked it. A crush on a dame when you're eighteen is terrific, Mac."

"So the kid killed Vince over the dame," Mac said. "From that balcony and through that hole in the shade — an easy potshot at a guy reading in bed."

"Mac, you don't have no faith in human nature. It was Vince's brand of smokes I found on the balcony floor. It was Vince's prints was in the dust on that sill. Vince uses the kid's room. Vince was a slick boy. He knew the kid reads in bed, nights. He figured that balcony a good natural setup, and the hole in the shade a better one. Vince was jealous of the kid over the jane."

"The heat's got you," Mac said. "Vince don't pull a rubout fancy. Those three boys in the gutter at Cedar and Sixth were leaded down. And they only didn't like the color of his girl's hair."

"Vince had a heart, though. A funny kind of heart. The kid was his brother, after all. He was touchy about having the kid know it was his brother's hand giving him the send-off — he was touchy about having the kid carry that last thought out of this world. Out on that balcony and behind that shade the kid wouldn't know."

"But, Sam, somebody might have spotted Vince from the street. The kid might have spotted him behind that lighted shade."

"No. Looking up from the street the balcony covers nearly half the window. The balcony is solid yellow brick and deep. Light shining through that shade on Vince wouldn't show no silhouette on the shade."

"But Sam —"

"Vince figured the angles yesterday. He planned on killing the kid tonight — the night of the payroll job — that's why I knew he wasn't in on the holdup. Yesterday was the kid's day off. The kid plays poker with the boys uptown on his day off. Those uptown boys play all-night games. Vince knew the kid wouldn't get home until time to go back to work. So he figured on doing the job tonight. That's why I knew he wasn't in on the holdup."

"But Sam —"

"The kid came home to change a shirt. Vince was sleeping in the kid's bed. The window was open from the bottom and the shade was down. Vince had checked the angle of the hole in the shade thoroughly. He was even sleeping now in the kid's bed."

"I know, but Sam —"

"If it was the kid who shot Vince through that hole in the shade, and from that balcony, there'd been a slug in the *back of Vince's head.* A guy asleep in that bed in the daytime would naturally lay on his side with his back to the shade, so the sun

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shining through that hole wouldn't glare in his eyes. But Vince was shot in the forehead and his eyes were staring at the dresser. Somebody shot Vince from the front of room 4-B."

"But that's just it!" Mac exploded. "If it wasn't the kid, who killed Vince?"

"Why did Vince want to kill the kid?" I asked.

"The way you got it figured out, over that jane," Mac said. "But I still think you're nuts with the heat."

"Who gave Vince's boys their orders at the holdup tonight?" I asked.

"That jane," Mac said.

"Yeah," I said. "Why? Why didn't Sig Morelli or one of the other muggs jump in and grab control? Because they didn't know Vince had a slug in his skull. Because they figured the jane got her orders from Vince. How did the jane know Vince was rubbed out with him in a special cooler and the papers hushed up? Because she killed Vince — so she could be boss of the mob."

"But Sam —"

"She knew Vince was jealous of the kid. She knew the kid had a crush on her. She played both those ends."

"Sam, the heat's got you bad. The kid's prints were on the gun. And Vince's. And no other ones."

"Sure. The kid must have handled the gun when he came back that second time for an extra five buck stake for that poker game. He saw Vince and figured the jane did it. He figured right. Her prints weren't on the gun because she wears gloves, white ones. What the kid didn't figure was that the jane was throwing a murder rap right at him. The jane saw a good chance to step into Vince's shoes and beat a murder rap all in one throw. And yesterday when she came into room 4-B and Vince's body was missing, she figured the kid had already gotten himself pinched. She seemed mighty pleased about something."

"Then why didn't the kid talk?" Mac said.

"I told you. He knew about the payroll job and his code wouldn't let him squeal. When he saw Vince that second time he figured the jane did it. He didn't figure the jane was slipping him a doublecross. He had a crush on the jane. He covered up for her. A crush on a jane when you're eighteen is terrific, Mac."

"This is a hell of a way to solve a case," Mac said. "It sets too much on a faith in human nature."

"Sure," I said. "I knew he wasn't such a bad kid. Now I got to find him a nice girl to take the place of Pinky."

"You did a lot for that kid," Mac said.

"Yeah," I said. "I got a soft spot for tough neighborhoods and the kids that grow up in them. O'Toole taught me that. And anyway, I almost was that kid's old man. He's got Helen's hair, all right."

Mac looked at me like I was nuts.

"Another guy was more romantic," I said. "He beat me out by a shade. His name was Vince Spiroli."

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Miriam Allen deFord has a specialized and personalized talent. Her detective and crime short stories are not quite like anyone else's — they have a touch, a feeling, an individuality all their own. It is because of this distinctive quality that Miss deFord's stories are particularly suitable for EQMM — for in the five years that EQMM has published the best in detective-crime short fiction, loyal readers of EQMM have come to expect not only the orthodox but the unorthodox as well, the rare and curious and unusual in a field too often stigmatized by the label "formula."

The three stories by Miriam Allen deFord which have already appeared in EQMM — "Mortmain," "Something To Do With Figures," and "Farewell to the Faulkners" — all have a classic stature; and all three have been originals written especially for EQMM's readership. Until Miss deFord cuts and polishes another gem of strange beauty, in the patient, painstaking manner of all truly fine craftsmen, we ask you to go back into the past and sample one of Miss deFord's earlier efforts. "The Oleander" was first published in 1930, and as you will discover for yourself, even sixteen years ago Miriam Allen deFord was, in her own way (always, you understand, in her own way), an uncompromising perfectionist.

THE OLEANDER

by MIRIAM ALLEN deFORD

EVEN when I still had my sight, the big oleander meant something very special to me. Afterwards, of course, it became still more important,—a sort of center of my being. Now that it is gone, and Gilbert, and in a sense Anne, and soon I shall be gone myself, it pleases me to trace the impalpable thread that bound us all together.

When I was still a small child, and Gilbert was a baby, while our mother and father were still alive, the oleander was already so large that by stretching my arm through my bedroom window I could touch the uppermost cool pink blossoms. I believe that in the east and in Europe, the oleander is only a small shrub, but here in California, in the warm, protected valleys, it grows to tree-like size.

This one had double pink flowers, peeping out from among the thick, glossy leaves. I remember its appearance so well — just as I remember its faint, troubling perfume. People with an insensitive sense of smell used to say it had no perfume at all, but I knew better.

My mother planted it when she was first married, and Gilbert and I played under it all through our childhood. We used to prick the leaves with a pin,

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to let out the milky sap, and pretend to use them as fodder for the animals of our Noah's Ark. Gilbert broke most of the animals in time, as he did all our toys, particularly mine. I can still hear my mother saying. "Let baby brother have it, he's smaller than you."

When I was about 18, and thought I was going to be a poet, many is the night I spent sitting by the open window in summer, instead of in bed where I belonged, breathing with the faint breeze in the oleander, sometimes stroking the smooth leaves and silky blossoms that waved just outside.

Then Gilbert and I went to the university, and after I met Anne, and almost immediately became so wholly and completely hers, I remember taking her to the ranch over the Christmas holidays, to meet my parents, and I remember too, standing with her under the oleander and thinking how its flowers were almost exactly the faint pink of her cheeks.

It was raining a little, a soft, pleasant rain, and Gilbert came out of the house rather abruptly and took Anne by the arm and hurried her onto the dry porch.

It was in our last year at college that the accident happened. You see, though Gilbert was younger than I, our parents liked us always to be together, and so I did not go to the university until he was ready. So we were nearly always in the same classes, and we stood side by side in the chemistry laboratory. Gilbert was majoring in chemistry. I cannot say I had a scientific mind, and as a selfish personal matter I should much rather have specialized in languages; but father preferred us to take the same courses.

Gilbert was much better than I in chemistry — in fact, I imagine I gained the name of being a good deal of a dullard, for I couldn't seem to get interested in the things I was studying and I did too much irrelevant reading on the side.

And of course a great deal of my time and thought went to Anne. I really think if that dreadful thing hadn't happened, Anne might have felt for me some day as I did for her. But of course it was such a dreadful shock to Gilbert that for a time he seemed really in a more pitiable case than I, and only Anne could comfort him. Besides, I should never have asked Anne to take a blind and disfigured man for a husband.

They say it was a defective test tube. It must have been, of course. All I can recall is standing by Gilbert in the laboratory while he heated the tube over a Bunsen burner, and then the sudden searing agony. After months in a hospital, they got me on my feet again.

The sight of both eyes was completely gone. No one ever told me the rest, except that one time when Gilbert couldn't control himself, just before he died; but though I couldn't see, I could feel that my face was no longer the face I had known. Poor Gilbert! It was terribly hard on him.

They took me to the ranch, and the only comfort there was for me in life

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was the oleander. I used to lie under it all day in the sunshine. I could reach up and touch its rough bark, and the leaves and the flowers, and it was as if there were one friend left in the world from whom I need not shrink or hide. I clung to it morbidly, I suppose. I know that the day they told me Anne was going to marry Gilbert, I threw my arms around its trunk, and lay for hours with my scarred face hidden by its root. It is strange that eyes can shed tears when they can no longer see.

After father died, mother and I lived alone together. Gilbert and Anne were in the city. He had not become a chemist, after all — I suppose it was too painful for him after what had happened.

I don't understand exactly what his business was, but it had something to do with stocks and bonds; I know, because of his trouble afterwards. They had a little girl but she died.

She was only three years old at the time, and the circumstances were very sad, too.

No one ever told me all the details, but as I recall it, Gilbert had had to punish her for some trivial childish lie or something of the sort, and she ran from him and fell down a flight of steps. A child, of course, could not realize that Gilbert's hot temper didn't mean anything. He had always had it, but his heart was warm — I am sure it was. They never had any more children.

I kept away from mother all I could, for I knew how dreadful it must be for her to see me. It seems queer to think that before all this happened people used to think me handsomer than Gilbert. I never agreed with them, and I know mother didn't, either. Gilbert was always her favorite and father's; that was natural; he was fiery, demonstrative and impulsive, and I was always a dull moony creature.

One night Gilbert came suddenly to the ranch, without Anne. Mother was in her room; she hadn't been well for several months, but we never thought it was anything serious.

Night and day are just about the same to me; I spent all that evening sitting under my oleander, whittling. I had begun whittling just to amuse myself, and to fill the time, years before; I had really grown quite skillful at it, I think. I used to carve all sorts of things for mother to use, and I imagine she just pretended out of kindness and pity to like them and prefer them, for of course they could have been bought anywhere, just as cheap and probably much better.

Bowls, and potato mashers, and clothes pins, and bread boards, household things like that.

So I was not even in the house, though I could hear Gilbert's voice distinctly, rather loud and very much excited. I know now that he was telling mother about his trouble.

Something to do with bonds, I think; some man who claimed that Gilbert had misappropriated certain funds given him in trust, or some nonsense like that. Anyway, things were so complicated that there was danger of Gilbert's arrest.

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I remember wishing that Gilbert realized better that mother wasn't well and mustn't be upset, when all at once I heard her scream. He must have told her how bad things were; that must have been the reason. That fool of a Maggie, our old cook who rushed to mother's room while I was stumbling up the porch, and found her on the floor, tried to tell everybody afterwards that Gilbert had struck his own mother.

Gilbert was quite right to discharge her at once, in spite of her years of service; no one could tolerate an hysterical liar like that. I asked Gilbert myself what put such a thing into Maggie's head, and he said when mother suddenly had the heart attack and fell, her forehead struck the side of the chair and was bruised. Mother's heart had been weak for years, and everyone knew about it.

I was not surprised when the funeral was over to find that everything had been left to Gilbert. After all, he was mother's favorite, and she knew she could trust him to take care of me. He could use money to good advantage, and all I needed was a bed and some food and my oleander.

That was another of Maggie's wild stories, that mother had shown her a will in which I was left half the estate. That was when Gilbert had to threaten her with suit for slander if she said any more, and she never dared make such a ridiculous charge again. It was most fortunate, as it turned out, that Gilbert got the money just when he did, for it settled that unpleasant affair in the city, and enabled him to retire.

He and Anne gave up their apartment and came to the ranch to live. Gilbert was always kind to me, and if in some small ways he did not seem to be, I understood the reasons for it very well. For instance, I could quite understand that it must have been very painful to Anne to see me, and I don't blame him for wanting me to let him keep me in a comfortable home or sanitarium.

But for the first time, I think, in my life, I could not agree to that. I was so used to the old house, and I felt as if it would tear my heart out to leave my oleander. It was more than ever my only real friend and comfort. I was quite willing to compromise, however, though Gilbert had to lose his temper with me once or twice first. I agreed finally to stay in my room during the daytime, and to go out only at night, when they were asleep. The new cook brought me my meals, and it was really a better arrangement all around.

For one thing, I discovered that, like the fool I am, I still felt just the same old way about Anne. I was just as glad to hear her voice, and not to feel that she was so hopelessly near me.

That was three years ago. I thought a great deal about Anne. It seemed to me that she wasn't happy, though why, I can't imagine. Of course, she might have been grieving over the little girl they had lost, or perhaps it was dull for her in the country.

Certainly it seemed to me very foolish of her to quarrel with Gilbert, as so

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often I could not help hearing her do. Surely in all those years she should have grown to know, as all our family did, that his quick temper didn't mean anything, that it was just his way. There was always a reason for it, and all anybody had to do was to say nothing and let it blow over — we always had, since he was a tiny child.

Even that time he shot Anne's dog, he was quite right in saying it had howled and annoyed him — I heard it myself; though perhaps it would have been better for him to have tried to control himself, since she was so fond of it. I confess I came nearer to being angry with Gilbert then than I ever had done before, especially after I heard her crying. But that he shot it before her eyes, I can scarcely believe.

All I could do to show my sympathy with Anne was to make the same little gimcracks for her that I used to make for mother, and send them to her by the cook.

She was very sweet about it; once when I was lying under the oleander, just thinking, she stole up to me — Gilbert would not have liked it at all, but he was at work on the ranch.

She took my hand and said I was her only friend. I had to seem quite cold and casual, and send her away, for I was trembling so I could hardly talk. It must have taken tremendous courage for her to come close to me like that and look right at me, and it wasn't necessary. I told her so.

Somehow I think Gilbert found out about it. Anyway, that night I heard them quarreling bitterly, and several times I heard my name mentioned. It was all I could do to keep from rushing in and telling them that I wasn't worth upsetting themselves over. But I kept quiet, and after a while I heard a sound as if Gilbert were slapping his hands together, and then there was no other sound except a little whimper that I suppose must have been the cat trying to get into the house. I called it, but I couldn't find it.

Two days later, Anne went away on a visit to see some friends. Although I had heard so little of her around the house, it seemed very empty without her. I asked Gilbert when she would be back, and he was very angry about it. I hope he didn't mean his answer the way it sounded.

"Never, while you're on my hands," he said.

But where could I go?

It was the next day, while I was asleep in my room, that I heard it happening. I knew instantly, springing from my bed, what it was. The ax might just as well have been laid at my own heart. I threw on my clothes and rushed out.

"What are you doing to my oleander?" I gasped.

Gilbert grasped me by the shoulder — I could feel that he was in one of his fits of anger.

"I'm getting rid of it," he snapped. "It does nothing but shade the house, and it's a nuisance."

"Gilbert!" I cried. "Please — mother planted it — it's —" and I can't remember what foolish, wild

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words I said. I suppose not being able to see, I got in the way of the ax. All I remember is the heavy blow on the side of my head, and then falling on a splintered bough that cut my hand.

When I came to, I was in bed again. It was very quiet, and it must have been night. I lay for hours, thinking.

I was able to be up in a few days. Anne was still away. I could not bear to go to the gaping spot where my oleander had been. I found Gilbert, and I was very calm. I did not go to him until I was sure I could be.

"All right again?" he asked. "Sorry about that glancing blow. Good it wasn't serious."

"Never mind," I mumbled. "I guess I was half asleep. I shouldn't have interfered."

He grunted.

"Would you mind," I went on, and somehow I kept my voice from trembling, "telling me what you've done with — with it?"

"The oleander? It's on the wood pile. I'm going to chop it up for fuel."

"I wonder —" I felt pretty dizzy, but I had to finish. "I wonder if you'd mind letting me have a branch? I'd like to whittle something out of it."

Gilbert laughed. "Why, sure," he said.

So I went with him while he chopped a branch off and gave it to me. It is rather a tough wood, and of course it was green, but I made myself a tray, and fitted the sides to it. I had the queerest feeling all the time; it seemed as if, while I was cutting it, it was still waving its green leaves over my head, cooling the sun. I found some of the scattered blossoms on the grass, and I kept those, too, and pressed them.

Then I had a little wood left, so I whittled out four meat skewers, and polished them. When the new cook came to give me my lunch, I asked her what we were having for dinner.

"Something too hot for a hot day," she grumbled. "Mr. Gilbert's ordered roast veal, with a temperature like this. Well, you and he can have it, none of us want anything today but something cold."

"I feel the same way," I said. "Nothing for me tonight but salad and iced tea. But here's something you can use," and I brought out the skewers. "Just try them, will you, in the roast tonight? I've tried making everything else in the world of wood, but these are the first skewers I've thought of. I'm curious to see how they'll work, with this green wood."

She took them away, and that night I had salad.

The doctor said it was that heavy dinner, with a roast on a hot night, that caused it. Gilbert had just finished the meal, the doctor told me afterwards, when he became violently ill. He died half an hour afterward.

You see, Gilbert never cared about the oleander the way I did, and he never read up about it as I did in my boyhood, or knew much concerning it.

For instance, he never knew that the wood — and every other portion — of the oleander is a deadly poison.

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Every great figure of history eventually leads a double life. . . . Sometimes while they are still alive but more often after they are dead, the truly great people grow out of the factual into the legendary. Why do we always paint the lily of genius? Why are we so eager to clothe the purely historical facts with a coat of many colors, weaving myths out of misters, moonshine out of misses? Surely it is because we are all romantics under the skin: deep inside ourselves we know that our heroes and heroines have feet of clay and hearts to match, yet deep inside ourselves we hug the illusion that our heroes are supermen. So, we substitute gold for clay and build shining legends out of the baser metals of plain human beings.

The image of Charlemagne, as we accept it today, is also one of double exposure. The alchemists of literature, using words as the philosopher's stone, have gilded the memory of the great emperor with innumerable legends. There are the tales, for example, of Charlemagne as a warrior who performed superhuman feats; and of the benevolent monarch who dispensed superfine justice. From the latter myth undoubtedly sprang the concept of Charlemagne we are about to bring you, that of Charles the Great as an 8th century sleuth — a detector of crime, a resolver of riddles, an avenger of evildoers who dared to follow the hum of the Whisperer.

Daniel Roselle, a new writer, has hit upon an appealing conceit. Writing in flowery medieval language and making no attempt, wisely, to sustain so magniloquent a style beyond short-short length, Mr. Roselle offers us the first in a series of new historical detective stories. The second in the series will appear soon, and at that time we will discuss further that rare and curious phenomenon — the famous man of fact in the role of fictional detective.

CHARLEMAGNE AND THE WHISPERER

by DANIEL ROSELLE

"*I seek refuge in the Lord of men, the King of men,*
From the evil of the Whisperer!"
— Chapter CXIV — al-Qur'ân

THERE are tales in the biting steel of the wondrous sword of the Great King Charles, the blessed *De Joieuse*, whose metal augmented by the golden powers cast by the sorcerer Malagigi could cleave the body of a Saracen in two with but a single stroke of his arm. There are stories

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in our misty memories of the great dog Becerillo who, faithful to his master the Lord Charles, lead the way to the Pass at Roncevaux to relieve the shattered remnants of the armies of Roland, Orlando, and the good Archbishop Turpin. And there are thoughts still borne to the childrens of the earth by the words of Einhard and the Monk of St. Gall of the military might of the noble Charles, who smashed like a cake on a furrow the pompous Saxons and the lust of the Lombards.

These things you know of Charlemagne, the most serene Augustus, great Emperor crowned by God eight hundred years after the Birth, King of the Franks and the Lombards, ruler of the Kingdom. Yet, by the breath of the great beast Abu-Lubabah, do you know of my Lord's mystic powers to divine the very thoughts of men, to sift out like grains of sand the evildoer, to right the wrong and bring justice to him who followed the sweet hum of the evil Whisperer?

Now you must know that in the month of the Plough, when the coloni on each manse ripped open the body of the earth and the Villicus made plans for banal collection, that a Frankish noble, the aged Rethgard, heard that the Lord Charlemagne and his Missi Dominici would soon pass through his fisc near Aix-la-Chapelle, and so he made haste to prepare for the visit. Halson the minstrel was hurried from the field, wine was pressed and poured into the vessels, and the falcon and hawks tested for the hunt. Rethgard rejoiced too that his four sons would be home for the visit — Teskin, wealthy merchant from Rome; Emid, missionary to Kent; Oltho, student-philosopher from Antioch; and Papin, famed warrior from Tours. For Rethgard felt the cold hand of Death near his heart and willed that his sons should know his dispensation.

As the sun-mother Phoebus slipped down behind the hills, at the beginning of the Hay month, the great Lord Charlemagne arrived. And first came the horsemen, twenty in strength, and then twelve men on foot armed with the pointed metal, and then the scholar Alcuin and the poet Angilbert, and then — oh, wonders of Pompey snuffed out like a candle; oh, deeds of Alexander put to flight — then came Lord Charles the Mighty and All-Powerful, mounted on the elephant Abu-Lubabah, his back firm and straight like the ancient oak, his silvery hair covered by the sparkling helmet, his eyes more clear than the waters of the Crystal Sea, his majestic beard full palm in length and white as the mountain snows. Then his three sons and five daughters and their retinue, and the trays of gifts.

Who can describe the merriment of the feast that night? Who can count the roasted cuts of veal, the pheasants and the grouse, the curling pastries, the goblets of good rich wine brought before my Lord? Yet you must know of his moderation; for he

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ate but sparsely, as was his wont, and drank naught but the blessing cup; and his eyes gleamed with respect for son Oltho and Alcuin the scholar when they placed their hands over the top of their cups, denying this excess. And the singing of the minstrel filled the hall with the sweetness of Aucassin and Nicolette and the sweep of the black horse Bayard, servant to Rinaldo. And the laughter and the giving of the *dona* by the aged Rethgard and the return by Charlemagne of twenty plates of Arabic inscription — these things must be told.

Then it was that Rethgard, his heart filled with the goodness of his fortune, spoke to his four sons:

"My sons, Teskin, Emid, Oltho, Papin, seed of my own, I grow old with eighty and six years and my days are full and soon surely I must die. I call you now to me to speak my dispensation. It is my will that when my soul rises from the earth all my land and all my fortune with it shall be equally divided among you."

And the four sons secretly rejoiced at these words, for each coveted the estate.

But Rethgard went on: "But there is a condition that you must know. Each of you shall receive what I have now decreed, only if during the years that you have been away from me you have lived as good Christian Lords, Defenders of the Faith, and followers of the rules of the Greatest God of all. Tomorrow I shall send my missions to trace your Christian spirit in the distant lands. This is my will!"

So saying, he roared for more wine, and the feast went on.

Later that night, when Stygian blackness covered the face of the moon like a silk woven cloth, all retired to their chambers, all save Rethgard who left the manor house to walk alone through the woodlands, seeking the special mellow wine of his favorite pressman. And the fog of the night closed in over the demesne and the common pasture and the meadows and there was stillness.

His cry was the sting of the scorpion, the cut of the curved knife, the tear of the wheel-rack. When they reached him in the morning he was quite dead, his body rent with the stabbing of Death.

Surely then the spirit of Lord Charles cried out for vengeance, and raising his stout right arm to the sky he vowed the words written in his *Capitulatio de Partibus Saxoniae:* "He who has killed his Lord shall meet like punishment!" Then his large clear eyes set to the task of bringing justice to the transgressor.

Till the height of the day Lord Charles struggled with the scene, yet his mind was still clouded by the deed. He who had done the murder had left little behind. He had taken time to set the body upright against an oak facing in the direction from which the sun rises; he had stripped Rethgard of all gold rings but had left behind the equally desirable ves-

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sel of special wine found at the side of the dead Lord; and he had not gone directly back through the woodlands by the shortest route, through the area where the swine roamed freely, but his steps showed he had skirted wide around the woods — even thus exposing himself to possible detection from the road. There was little more.

All that day the great Lord Charles said not a word, his lion-like eyes flashing fiercely at all he encountered, and a gloom as deep as the treacherous ambush itself filled the manor house. When, however, after they had supped, the poet Angilbert — he who better than most men knew his Lord — saw the great King smile and dip his large shaggy head, he vowed that all would be well.

Now you must know that when Charlemagne called the four sons, Teskin, Emid, Oltho, and Papin, and the entire host before him in the hall that night, there was one whose soul shivered with the deed. How much more so then when the King spoke:

"Murder is foul as the breath of the stubbed root," said Charlemagne, "but murder of a friend is the work of the Whisperer himself, the blackest Devil of the raging fires. Know you then that it will be avenged. Lord Rethgard was not murdered by the stealthy thief or robber of the rich — for surely such as he would have taken too the large vessel of wine that would bring such excellent exchange in market. Why, too, in his haste to escape detection, did he take a long route around the swine, even thus exposing himself to view? And why did he stop to place the Lord's body facing east — in the direction from which the sun rises?

"The answer to these questions brings the murderer's red hand before us. Wine was refused because he scorned it with unnatural religious distemper. Swine were avoided only by one who dared not touch their flesh. And religious belief, forming the unalterable habit, decreed that the soul of the dead shall face the east — and Mecca. For is it not written in al-Qur'ân in the Chapter of the Resurrection: 'Faces on the day of death shall be bright gazing on their Lord!' These things are true, and the murderer is therefore a Mohammedan!"

Thus saying our Great King Charles halted, and many there were who thought he had gone mad. For all were Christians there and none followed the rule of Mohammed, for such was the law. Never was my Lord more magnificent in his wisdom, never farther from madness, never nearer to the truth.

"I decree," he said, and his words stung with sharpness, "that all shall drink the cup of wine."

What more need I tell you? The cups were passed and all drank their fill with the haste of the fleeting hawk — all save Oltho, who flung it from his hand as he would the plague.

"It is true!" Oltho cried. "At Antioch I chose the religion of Mohammed and al-Qur'ân for my faith.

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Had my father, the Lord Rethgard, discovered my infidelity, then surely would I have been deprived of my rightful heritage."

Then Oltho spoke the words of a man of courage: "But noble Charles, as you love your faith, so I love mine. I shall die for it!"

When Charlemagne heard these last words he was moved to admiration, for Oltho could have gained safety had he partaken of the wine in opposition to his faith. Lord Charles could not see murder without justice, but man's true faith of any kind he could not help respecting. Thus, in the month of the Harvest, he decreed that Oltho should not receive the degradation of public tortures before the populace at the market place, but that instead his head should be quickly severed from his body by the single stroke of a Knight's sword — as befitted a man of basic honor.

And thus it was done.

FOR MYSTERY LOVERS — The publishers of ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE also publish the following paper-covered mystery books at 25¢ each:

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"The Wrists on the Door" by Horace Fish appeared originally in the May 1919 issue of "Everybody's Magazine." It was included by Edward J. O'Brien, that creative connoisseur of the short story, in his THE BEST SHORT STORIES OF 1919, *and to the best of your Editor's knowledge has never been reprinted since except as a paperbook published in 1924 by B. W. Huebsch Inc. & Mitchell Kennerley.*

It is nearly thirty years since your Editor first read "The Wrists on the Door" and in all that time the story has remained extraordinarily alive in our memory. When we re-read it this year, at the suggestion of Mr. Kennerley himself, we frankly found its style old-fashioned and exclamatory; but the tremendous force of its basic idea — a conception unique in the entire history of the short story — has not diminished an iota since the day the story was born in print. Writing styles may change from decade to decade and from generation to generation, but ideas rooted in truth do not, and in "The Wrists on the Door" Horace Fish projected in words one of the most remarkable plot ideas ever dreamed up by the human brain. That is a tall statement, we realize, yet we are positive you will agree with us after you have finished reading what has been called "the most powerful American short story of our times."

Isn't it an incredible phenomenon that despite such critical praise "The Wrists on the Door" should be virtually unknown even to "the constant reader"? Charge an error to the anthologists who have permitted one of the most unusual mystery stories ever written to lapse into biblivion. EQMM is proud to correct that error.

THE WRISTS ON THE DOOR

by HORACE FISH

BETWEEN his leather easy-chair at one end of his drawing-room and the wall with his wife's portrait at the other, Henry Montagu was pacing in a state of agitation such as he had never experienced in his fifty years of life. The drawing-room was no longer "theirs." It was his — and the portrait's. The painting was of a girl who was not more beautiful in radiance of feature and lovable contour of body than the woman a generation older who had died two months ago.

Suddenly he stopped short in the middle of the room, his hands in his pockets. "My God!" he cried.

Then he shut his teeth on the words as sharply and passionately as he had uttered them, and raised one of his hands to his brow. There were drops of cold sweat upon it.

Mr. Montagu was a simple, selfish,

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good-natured business-man, never given to imaginative thoughts or to greater extremes of mood than the heights and depths of rising and falling stocks. Yet his experience of the last two hours had shown him to himself as a creature wretchedly inadequate to face the problem that confronted him — the simple problem of widowhood.

He was not bitter at his wife's death. Not only did he consider himself too sensible for that, but he *was* too sensible. Death is an inevitable thing. And the one fact involving the simplicity of the problem was no more than many another man had borne without a thought — his childlessness.

Yet as if the whole two months in their strangeness, their sad novelty, had been concentrating their loneliness for an accumulated spring at him, the last two hours had driven home to him that this secondary fact had *not* been inevitable, that what he was suffering tonight could have been avoided.

He had not wished to have children, and neither had the beautiful woman whose painted spirit smiled down so pitilessly now on his tragedy of jangled nerves and intolerable solitude. Deliberately and quite frankly, without even hiding behind the cowardly excuse of the tacit, they had outspokenly chosen not to.

After his desperate exclamation, he had laughed and thrown himself into his chair. He had forced the laugh, seeking to batter down with it a thrill that was akin to fright at an abrupt realization that in those two dreadful hours he had done three unprecedented things. He had spoken aloud there by himself, an action he had always ascribed exclusively to children and maniacs; he had harbored absurd temptations; and finally he had ejaculated "My God!" which he had thought appropriate to a man only in the distresses of fiction or after complete ruin on the Stock Exchange.

That exclamation had sprung from him when he had caught himself thinking how gladly he would give half his fortune if he could have a companion, even his butler, for the rest of the evening, his whole fortune, exactly as if he had died, if he could but have a son to give it to.

That freedom from care, which they had chosen to call freedom from responsibility, had been their mutual property, but tonight, in his hopeless solitude, it seemed that he was paying the whole price for it. She had met the unknown, but with the known — himself, her whole life — beside her, and her ordeal was over. His, he felt now, was worse, and already beginning. After all, he reflected, there was a certain rough justice in it; the one spared longer in the world of bodily people bore, in consequence, the reverting brunt of their double selfishness. But the remnant of life seemed a poor thing tonight. The further it stretched, in his suddenly stirred imagination, the poorer, the emptier, it seemed.

And having stirred, after a whole lifetime of healthy sleep, his imagina-

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tion gripped him in a strong and merciless embrace. It seemed to twist him about and force him to look down the vista of the coming years and at all their possibilities, even the desecrational one of marrying again and calling into life the son that he had never wanted before. At the thought, he flushed with the idea that the portrait's eyes were reading his face, and compelled himself to look bravely at it; but as he met the lovely eyes strange questions darted into his brain: whether he would not rather have been solely to blame; whether his all-possessive love of her would not be more flawless now if she had been a flawless eternal-feminine type, longing for motherhood, but denying it for his sake; whether he would not be happier now in looking at her portrait if some warm tint from a Renaissance Madonna had mellowed the radiant Medici Venus who smiled from the frame. He was seized by a desire to turn the gazing picture to the wall.

Halfway across the room, he checked the impulse with a gasp of self-disgust, but with hands raised involuntarily toward it he cried:

"*Oh, why didn't we?*"

As he stood trembling with his back to it, the second absurd temptation of the night assailed him — to dash on his hat and go to Maurice's, a restaurant of oblique reputation to which his wife had once accompanied him out of curiosity, and which, in a surprising outburst of almost pious prudery, she had refused to visit again. Nor had she ever allowed him to go thereafter himself, and though she had made no dying request of him, he knew that, if she had, that would have been it.

In his shaken state the thought of his one club, the Business Men's, was repugnant. Maurice's, expansive, insinuating and brilliant, called to his loneliness arbitrarily, persistently. But with a glance over his shoulder at the portrait, he put the thought away. Then, straightening up, he walked to his chair again, sat tensely down, and faced the long room and his childish terror at its emptiness.

Innocent as had been his impulse toward Maurice's, and full as was Broadway with places as glittering and noisy, his morbid duty to debar that one resort seemed to him to condemn him to the house for the night. Why was it the butler's night out? Even to know that he was below stairs — Would other nights be like this? *Every* night — The possibility turned him cold. His thoughts were racing now, and even as he gripped the arms of the chair a still worse terror gripped his mind. His loneliness seemed to have become an actual thing, real as a person, a spirit haunting the luxurious, silent house. He was facing the door, and its heavy mahogany, fixing his attention through his staring gaze, seemed to be shutting him alone with the dead. Save for his trembling self and his wife's painted eyes, the big room was lifeless. It was beyond the closed door that his imagination, now running beyond control, pictured the presence of his frightful

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guest — his own solitude, coming in ironical answer to his craving for companionship.

With a gasp, he drew himself up in the center of the room, and in a surge of determined anger, with his eyes on the door, facing it as he would have faced an enemy before he attacked, he deliberately gave his mind to his fear, letting it sweep through him, trying to magnify it, reading every horror that he could into the imagined presence that he intended to dispel, and then, tormenting himself with slow steps, he walked to the door, reached his hand to the knob, and opened it.

Though his mouth opened for a cry of terror, no sound came from him as he staggered back, and a waiting figure pitched into the room, rushed wildly past him with a whimper like that of a wounded animal, and flung itself, face forward, into the empty chair.

As if through the same doorway that had given entrance to the desperate wretch, his terror seemed to leave him. While he stood gasping, with pounding heart, staring at the limp, shuddering manhood that had hurled itself into his home, Henry Montagu suddenly felt himself a man again.

With the cold plunge of his senses into rationality, they told him that he was in the presence of some fatal and soul-sickening tragedy, yet this horror that had dashed into the hollow privacy of his house was at least real to him. Overwhelmed as he was by the frightful appearance of the young man, who was now weeping abandonedly, he had no fear of him, and his first act was a practical one — he swiftly, quietly closed the door. It was done in an instinct of protection. It would be useless to question him yet, but that he was a fugitive, and from something hideous, Montagu took for granted.

He stood looking across the room at his outlandish guest, trying to docket the kaleidoscopic flock of impressions that had flown into his mind from the instant he swung back the door. Though noble, even splendid in its slender lines, the youth's figure had half-fallen, half-sprung through the doorway, animal-like. There had not been even a ghost of sound in the hallway, yet it was as if he had been in the act of hurtling himself against the closed door, hammering at it with upraised hands. Mr. Montagu had been horrified by it instantaneously, as by a thing of violence with every suggestion of the sordid, but the poor sobbing fellow who now lay in the chair with his arms and head drooping over the big leather arm seemed to him as immaculately dressed as himself. Remembering the fleeting posture at the door, his eyes went involuntarily to the hanging, graphic hands. In the light of his reading-lamp they gleamed white, and as he watched, his heart sinking with pity at their thinness, two slow red drops rolled from under the cuffs down the palms, and fell to the floor.

"Good God!" breathed Henry Montagu.

He had never doubted for the frac-

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tion of a second that his guest was a criminal, and in every sense a desperate one, but, just as instinctively, he felt certain that no matter what the horror he had run from, he was more sinned against than sinning. Every line in the boy's fragile, pathetic figure went straight to the older man's heart. It came to him, almost joyously, that there had been premonition in his strange mood of longing for a son. As an end to this nerve-racking night, there was work to do — for the remainder of it, at least for a brief moment, he had a companion in his grim, empty house.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed aloud. "Thank God! Thank God!"

The young man had spoken, and the repetition of his own expression startled him. It was like an echo of himself.

Again Mr. Montagu shook himself together. If the boy could speak, it was time to question him. He had not yet seen his face, beyond a flashing imprint on his brain of a look of terrific fear and terrific exultation as it had dashed past him, but he was prepared to like it. He braced himself, walked over and stood in front of the chair. With an object — even this object — to justify it, he gladly surrendered himself now to the fatherly instinct he had so bitterly struggled against, and he felt that he would like, with his first words, to put his hand reassuringly on the crumpled shoulder. But the night had left his nerves still raw — in his sensitivity he could not bear the thought that the trembling figure would shrink from his touch, and he kept his hand firmly at his side.

"My boy," he said gently, "you mustn't be afraid of me. Tell me what you've done."

The young man raised his head, sank back in the chair, and looked at him.

Not once in the long evening of lonely terror had Mr. Montagu had such a shock. An eternally lost soul, a damned thing staring at paradise, seemed to gaze at him out of the boy's eyes. He thought he was seeing all the sins of the world in them, yet the look was appallingly innocent. He seemed to be discovering those sins in the dark, ravening eyes, but to be feeling them in himself as if the forgotten, ignored innermost of his own life were quaking with guilt under the spell of this staring presence. In the state of horrified sympathy to which it had precipitated him, he morbidly felt almost responsible for the brooding evil in the boy as well as aghast at it. But even this sense of sin, implying as it did a skeleton of naked, primal right and wrong seemed of small import to his astounded mind beside the nameless, unmentionable sorrow that pervaded the face and stabbed at Henry Montagu's heart. He knew without question that he was looking at tragedy — worse than he had supposed the world could hold or any human thing, in any world, be subject to. It was a man's face in every line and poise and suggestion, but for all its frightful knowledge he had to call it beautiful — the clear-cut word "hand-

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some" ran away from it like a mouse into a hole, leaving it a superb horror that, as soon as his paralyzed muscles could respond to his instinct, drove his hand to his face to shut away the deliberate, searching gaze.

"Done?" answered the young fellow at last. "What have I done? *Good God!* I've done a thing never accomplished in human life before, a thing more terrific than the world's entire history, from the moment of the first atom crawling on it, has ever known!"

He could not have spoken more solemnly and convincingly if he had reverently murdered, one by one, a whole nation of people, and it was some such picture that came into Henry Montagu's mind as, shivering and fascinated, he watched him and listened.

But the young man said no more.

"If — if you will tell me what you've done," said Mr. Montagu haltingly, his pity sweeping every caution away, "or simply what you want of me, I will do anything for you that I possibly can."

"There is nothing in this world," answered the boy wearily, "that anybody can do for me." But suddenly, impulsively, he added: "There is just one thing, that you can do — not for me, but for yourself. Don't ask me questions. For your own sake don't!"

"But — " began Mr. Montagu.

"If you knew who I am or what I am, and what I've deliberately done," cried the boy, "you'd curse this night and curse me. What — what is *your* name?"

"Henry Montagu," said his host simply.

He pondered it. "That has a nice sound. I like it. And I — I like you. So don't ask me questions!"

The elder man was looking down at the thin white hands again, and the naïve comment brought a sudden contraction to his throat. "Poor little boy!" was on his lips, but an intuition like a woman's warned him that the words would make the desolate figure weep again, and his utmost strength quailed from the thought of seeing it, now that he had seen the face. As the white hands clasped themselves together, he had seen that the under sides of the wrists were bruised and dark.

"Whoever and whatever you are, whatever terrible thing you've done, I only know that you make me think of — of — Oh, the crown of thorns, the cross —"

"Someone with a crown of thorns?" said the young man wonderingly. "Who was that?"

Mr. Montagu stared at him incredulously. That any man, no matter how base a criminal, should not know the story and the name of God's son, astonished him, for the moment, more than anything yet had done.

"Oh, yes, yes, I remember now," continued the boy. "Yes, that was very, very sad. But I'm selfish and preoccupied with my own dreadful trouble, and that whole history, tragic as it was, was a very happy one compared with mine!"

With a cold shudder, Henry Mon-

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tagu believed him. He realized that as yet he had done nothing for him. Food and drink had occurred to him, but in the minutes that they had passed together the stranger had grown more virile. He was no longer the incredible figure of wretchedness that had dashed into the room. He was sitting forward in the chair now, his eyes on the portrait.

"Is that your wife?" he asked.

"My — my dead wife," answered Mr. Montagu.

His own eyes reverting again and again to the lacerated wrists, he did not see the changing expressions in his visitor's as they studied the eyes of the portrait; but as the boy now leaped impulsively to his feet he saw in them a fierce gleam that was like the hatred of a maniac. He thrilled with renewed terror as the boy once more sprang to him like an animal, and with a growl in his throat rushed toward the portrait.

"Stop!" he shouted, and the boy almost cringed to a halt in the middle of the floor.

When, after his first chill of horror at the act itself, Henry Montagu realized that the desecration was his own thought, he sank weak and dizzy into the chair that the boy had left. But again he mastered his frightened mind and thrust away from it the sinister oppression of omen and coincidence. Unwillingly but helplessly, he was letting into his thoughts the theory that, after he had opened the door instead of before he had opened it, the room had been harboring a maniac. And the theory stabbed him. A mushroom growth of tenderness had germinated in his pity and was growing nearer and nearer to a personal liking for the beautiful, pathetic figure of youth that stood before him, wilted and helpless again, in the center of the room.

"My boy," he said quietly, "I ought to resent that, but strangely enough I don't find myself resenting the idea of your taking strange liberties in my house. In fact, I — I had that same impulse. I nearly did that myself, just before you burst in here."

The young man looked at him in amazement.

"*You* were going to turn — Mrs. Montague's picture to the wall? Why — why, you old dirty beast!"

To Henry Montagu there was no vulgarity in the words. Their huge reproach of him drove every other quality out of them and a deep color into his face.

"But I — I quelled the impulse. And y — you would actually have done it!" he stammered.

"I had a reason and a right to!" cried the young man. "I'd never seen it before and if it repelled me I had a right never to look at it again! But she was *your wife!*"

Once more he stood, his eyes avoiding the portrait and wandering hungrily about the rest of the beautiful room.

"Well," he said, after a few moments, "goodbye!" And he walked toward the door.

"Stop!" cried Mr. Montagu again.

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He sat forward on the edge of the chair, trembling. After hours of successive surprises, the simple announcement of his visitor's departure had struck him cold with the accumulated force of his past lonely terror and his present intense curiosity. Again the boy had obeyed his command with a visible shiver, and it hurt the older man by recalling to him the suggestion of crime, of the place and the tragedy he must have escaped from, the unknown cloud he was under. But however involved in the horrible he might become by detaining him, shaken and filled with inexplicable grief as he was by his presence, worst of all was the fear of being alone again after a frightful, brief adventure in his life, vanished and unexplained. He wanted to reassure and comfort the wavering, sorrowful boy, but all he could stammer in apology for his shout was: "Wh — where are you going?"

"What difference does it make to *you* where I go?" asked the boy drearily. "If you must know, I'm going to Maurice's."

Mr. Montagu sprang to his feet. With bitter lips he kept himself silent at this final thrust of the hypernatural, but the damp beads had returned to his brow. His terror lasted only a moment, and in his resurging desire to hold back the boy, he demanded:

"What are you going to *Maurice's* for?"

He had not supposed that there was a particle of color in the pitiful face, but as the boy answered, a delicate flesh-tint seemed to leave it, turning him deathly white.

"I — I want to look at the women," he said.

At his agitation and pallor, the hectic whisper of his voice, above all, the light of fiendish hate that leapt into his beautiful eyes and ravaged their look, a physical sensation crept through the older man from head to foot and held him motionless.

But it was not horror at the boy himself. As he stood there wan and shivering before him, every best instinct in Henry Montagu rushed uppermost, and he felt that he would give anything in his life, gladly devote, if not actually give, that life itself, to set the boy right with the world. And with his terror gone and his horror going, he impulsively walked across the room and stood between him and the door.

"Why do you leave me this way? You mustn't mind what I say to you or how I say it, for it can't be any more abrupt or strange than the way you came here. I don't want you to go to Maurice's. And if you do, I'm going with you."

"No! No!" cried the boy fearfully.

"I don't want you to leave me. I want you to confide in me. I want you to trust me, and to tell me, without fear, what it is you've done."

"No, no, no, no! Don't ask me to!" cried the boy.

"I do ask you to. I have some right to know. I'd be justified in detaining you if I wanted to — "

"You couldn't!" cried the trembling youth passionately.

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"I said I'd be *justified*. Are *you*, in dashing like a shot into my life and then leaving me without a word to explain it? I've played host to you gladly, though you've torn my nerves to pieces. Remember how you came here!"

"Yes! Yes!" ejaculated the boy bitterly. "I'm an intruder! I forced myself on you and I know it! God knows I know it!"

"I didn't mean it unkindly. I tell you, I want you to *stay!* I want you to, no matter what you are or what you've done. You've admitted that you've done something — something terrific —"

"And I have!" cried the boy, his eyes lighting wildly. "At last, at last! I've done it, I've *done* it!"

"And in spite of it, I want you to stay! Whatever it is, I want to protect you from the consequences of it!"

"Look to yourself!" cried the boy. "You'll curse me yet for coming here! Let me go, and protect *yourself!*"

"I am no longer considering myself, I've done that too much in my life, and tonight I'm reckless. No matter *what* crime —"

"Crime?" His visitor flashed wondering eyes upon him. "You fool! You fool!" Again, the exclamation was like an echo of himself, but Mr. Montagu had no time to entertain the thought, for the boy was stammering out his astonishment in hysterical syllables. "I — a criminal! Oh, I might have *known* it would seem that way to you! But *I* —"

Again under the penetrating gaze his host felt himself morbidly guilty, but there was a thrill of gladness in his heart that now welcomed the grim alternative of the boy's simple madness.

"Stay with me!" he cried. "Sleep here, and rest, and then —"

"Let me go to Maurice's!" cried the boy desperately. "You'll regret it if you don't! Oh, for the pity of God, for pity of *yourself*, let me leave you while I still *offer* to leave you!"

Mr. Montagu backed himself against the door.

"What is it you want to look at the women in Maurice's for?" he demanded.

The boy hung fire under the determined voice.

"The — the women who go to Maurice's are — are — of a — certain *kind*, aren't they?"

"Some of them — most of them," said Mr. Montagu. "If you've never been there, why do you want to go? They're not unusual; simply — painted women."

"Painted?" repeated the boy in astonishment. He turned to the portrait. "*That's* a painted woman, too. Aren't they *alive* at Maurice's?"

In his marvel at the enormous innocence of it, Mr. Montagu wondered, for the first time, what the young man's age could definitely be, but in a moment he remembered the one pitiful way to account for the pathetic question, and his voice was very gentle as he said:

"My boy, if you have your heart set on going to Maurice's, you shall go.

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But surely, after this mysterious time together in my house, and knowing that whatever you may be I welcome your companionship, you won't refuse my request to let me go with you? To say that I've enjoyed it would be to put a queer word to a terrible business that I have no way of understanding. But until you came I was bitterly, hungrily lonely — "

"Don't! Don't!" cried the boy. "I can't bear it! You don't know what you're talking about! Oh! let me go to Maurice's, and let me go alone! If you insist on going with me I can't stop you — "

"I do insist," said Mr. Montagu.

"But I can plead with you not to! And I can warn you what the price will be! Oh — " and he stretched out his hands in so imploring a gesture that his host could see the dull, dried blood of his cruelly injured wrists — "for God's sake, for *God's* sake, believe what I tell you! *If you leave this house with me tonight, you're lost!* Oh, God, God, I see you don't believe me! Tell me this, I beg of you, I demand of you — did you *feel* that I was in the hall tonight, before you opened the door?"

"Yes," said Mr. Montagu.

"Had I made any noise?"

"No."

"Then I can prove to you that I know what I'm saying! I *did* that! I *made* you feel me! Till after you let me in, I wasn't strong enough to make a sound! Yet I made you know I was there! Am I telling the truth, then? When I started to leave you, and now, even now, in warning you I was doing, I *am* doing, a more unselfish thing, a decenter thing, than any you've ever done in all your years of life! It's because I like you more than I want to! I'm unselfish, I tell you! I *wanted* you to go to Maurice's with me! I intended to make you, as I made you let me in! But if you do, you'll find me out! I'll tell you! I won't be able to conceal it! You'll know the truth about me! You've said all this was mysterious — for your own sake, let it stay so! You needn't think all truths are beautiful, and the truth about me is the most ghastly in the universe!"

"I *want* to find you out," said Mr. Montagu, steadying his voice. "I want to know the truth."

"By that cross and crown of thorns that mean so much to you and nothing at all to me," implored the boy, "*don't go!* I swear to you, *mine is a more terrible secret than any living heart has ever held!* You'll hate me, and I don't want you to! Oh, *while* I don't, while I'm *merciful* to you, believe me, and let me go alone! No loneliness that *you* could ever suffer would equal the price that you will pay if you go with me!"

Though the sense of horror sweeping indomitably through him was worse than any he had felt before, Mr. Montagu's answer was deliberate and resolute:

"I told myself only a few minutes ago that I would sacrifice anything in my life, almost my life itself, to — well, to this. Do you mean that the price would be — my — death?"

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He threw every possible significance demandingly into the word, and the boy's voice was suddenly quiet in its tensity as he gazed back at him.

"It would be worse than death," he said solemnly. "If you let me go, and face your loneliness here, there's a chance for you. If you leave the house with me tonight, you're as lost as I am, and I am irretrievably damned and always have been damned. As truly as you see me standing before you now, the price is — madness."

"Come," said Mr. Montagu, and without another word he opened the door.

At Maurice's, Mr. Montagu led the way to the far side of the big room, threading in a zigzag through the gleam of bright silver, the glitter of white linen, the crimson of deep carnations. Maurice's in its own way was admirably tasteful; as distinctively quiet and smooth in its manners and rich hangings as it was distinctly loud in its lights and ragged in its music. No after-theatre corner of Broadway had a crisper American accent of vice, or displayed vice itself more delicately lacquered.

Mr. Montagu, on the way to the table, looked several times over his shoulder, ostensibly to speak to his companion, but in reality to see whether the extraordinary boy was running the gantlet of eyes he had presupposed he would. And each time he met inquisitive faces that were not only staring but listening.

His own conspicuousness was grilling, but it was part and parcel of his insistent bargain; he could understand, quite sympathetically, how the youth's appearance, as awful as it was immaculate, should pound open the heart of any woman alive; and his suppressed excitement was too powerful for him to resent even the obvious repugnance in the faces of the men until he imagined an intentional discourtesy to the boy on the part of the waiter.

To himself, the man was overservile, and elaborately cautious in pulling out his chair, but he stood, with his face quite white, and his back to the boy, and pulled out none for him. Henry Montagu had never yet bullied a waiter, and he did not bully now. But with an icy glare of reproof at the man, he rose and set the chair for his guest himself.

"Shall I order for you?" he asked gently as the boy sat quietly down; and made irritably incisive by the tendency of near-by men and women to listen as well as watch, he emphasized his expensive order of foods and wines, repeated each item loudly to cheapen the listeners, and sent the man scuttling.

In his intense desire to see the effect of the queerly chosen place on his queerly chosen companion, he now turned to him. And as he saw the effect, every shock of the night seemed to recoil upon him. The feeling of mystery; the foreboding, despite his courage and his conviction that the boy was mad, of the imminent unknown; his recurrent and absorbing curiosity to learn the gruesome secret

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that he had declared; all rushed one by one back upon him, and then as swiftly left him to the simple grip of horror at his face. It was gazing at woman after woman, here, there and yonder, throughout the large room, deliberately, searchingly, venomously, its great eyes and set lips and every tense haggard line fuller and fuller of an undying hate that eclipsed even that which had shaken Henry Montagu before they came. Appalled and fascinated, he looked with him, and back at him, and with him again, to the next and the next. There were women there, and ladies of every sort, good, bad and indecipherable; yet in every instance the childlike, horribly sophisticated eyes had picked their victim unerringly, deterred by neither clothes, veneer, nor manner.

As he stared with him from frightened female face to frightened female face, Mr. Montagu realized shamefully that his own features were helplessly mirroring the detestation of the boy's, and he changed from very pale to very red himself as woman after woman flushed crimson under his gaze. Yet the boy's face grew calm and his voice was perfectly so as he turned at last from his horrid review and met the eyes of his host.

"I see what you meant, now, by 'painted' women. Well, they'd much *better* be dead!"

At the tone, cruelly cool as if he planned to see that they were, Mr. Montagu shivered. "Why, *why* do you hate them like that?" he whispered.

The fierce anger flickered dangerously in the great eyes again.

"Because they're my enemy! Because they and the wicked thing they mean are my prowling, triumphant enemy, and the enemy of all others like me!"

"Oh, my boy, my boy!" pleaded the man of the world, sickly. "You don't realize it, but I can tell you from appearances — some of those women you stared at are here with their *husbands!*"

"So was *your* wife when she came here," said the boy.

Mr. Montagu fell back in his chair with a gasp. As swiftly as it had leapt into his mind, the frightful implication of the words leapt out again in his amazement at the boy's knowledge of the incident.

But the waiter stepped between them with the order, and in obvious terror now instead of simple aversion, clattered it down with trembling hands.

"Go away! Go away!" commanded Mr. Montagu angrily. "*I'll* arrange it! Go!" And the waiter escaped.

"How did you know?" he asked; but without waiting for a reply he poured out the boy's wine and his own, and took a long hasty draft.

"Oh!" cried the boy piteously. "Don't ask me! I shouldn't have said it! I knew I'd let it out if you came here with me! I'll be telling you everything in a minute, and you'll go stark mad when you know!"

The inference rushed again upon Henry Montagu, a worse vague horror

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than any yet, and he almost sprang from his chair.

"Are you going to tell me my wife was unfaithful to me, and with — with — "

"Fool! Fool!" cried the boy. "I wish to God she *had* been unfaithful to you! I tried to make her, I can tell you that! Then there'd have been at least half a chance for *me!* But now that she's dead, there's no chance for either of us, even you! Unless — O God! — unless you'll control yourself and think! I beg you again, I beg of you, *think* again! Go away from here, go now, without asking me anything more, and there's just a shade of a chance for you! I told you there was none if you left the house, but there may be, there may be! Go home, and forget this, and be satisfied your wife loved you, for she did. She kept herself for you *at my expense!* Go now, and they'll let you go. But if you stay here and talk to me, you'll leave this place in manacles! I'm here, *among those women*, and I'm with you! My secret will come out and drag you down, as I planned it should before I began to like you! And you like me, too — I feel it. For *my* sake, then, for God's sake and for your sake, *won't you go?*"

"No!" cried Mr. Montagu, "I don't judge you, but it's your duty, and in your power, to put me where I can! I harbored you, thinking you were a frightened fugitive, and you weren't. You sicken me with a doubt about the wife I loved — Who are you? What are you?"

"If you believed I knew as much of her as I said I did," cried the boy, "why don't you believe me when I assure you that she loved you? What more should *you* demand? I meant everything I said, and more — your wife was nothing but a licensed wanton, *and you knew it!* You ask me who and what I am — so long as she loved you, who are *you*, and what are *you*, to point a finger at her?"

A rush of instinctive fury filled the man, but he felt as dazed at finding himself angry at the beautiful unhappy youth, as if he had known him for years.

"If you think I'm crazy," cried the boy, "I'll show you, as I showed you once before, that I know what I'm talking about! I'll tell you something that was a secret between you two, and your wife didn't tell me, either! The night you'd been here, after you'd gone home, *after you were locked in your room*, you disputed about this place! She refused to come here again, and she refused to tell you why! But I know why!"

"Who are you and what are you?" Mr. Montagu demanded. "I command you to solve this mystery and solve it now!"

His voice had risen to a shout, but a sudden lump in his throat silenced it.

"Oh," wept the boy, "if you've liked me at *all*, put it off as long as you can, for you'll make me tell you I hate you, and *why* I hate you!"

"*Hate* me?"

It had struck Henry Montagu like a flail in the face, wiping away his an-

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ger, his astonishment at the boy's uncanny knowledge, even his astonishment that the word was able to strike him so.

"I — I've suffered enough through you!" he stammered painfully. "And if I've got to suffer more, I insist on doing it now and getting it over with!"

"Don't! don't! It will *never* be over with!" gulped the boy.

"I'm *through*!" cried Mr. Montagu. "*Who* are you? *What* are you?"

At the determined finality of the voice the boy quivered like a helpless thing, and his stuttering ejaculations came as if shaken out of him by the shivering of his body.

"Wh — *who* am I?"

"*Yes!*"

"Wh — *what* am I?"

"*Yes!*"

Never yet had he been so awful as in the torment and majesty that gazed like fate at Henry Montagu now, and the frightful fire of the eyes seemed to dry up the tears on his cheeks at its first flare of accusing righteousness.

"*I'm the child that you and your wife refused to have!*"

As the aghast man shrank back before his blighting fury, he leaned farther and farther toward him.

"*Now* do you know why I hate you as no human thing can hate? *Your wilful waste has made my hideous want!* Now do you know why I said I'd done a more terrific thing than had ever been done in the world's history before? *I've gotten in!* At last, at last, I've gotten in, in spite of you, and after she was dead! I've gotten in despite you, and without even a *woman's* help! Do you believe *now* that my history is more terrible, or not? He suffered, and suffered, and He died. But He'd *lived!* His torture was a few hours — for mine tonight, I've waited almost as many years as He did, and to what end? *To nothing!* God, God, do you see *that?*"

He twisted open his hands and held out his bruised wrists before the trembling man's eyes. "For all those years — "

He suddenly drew himself to his full height and threw them passionately above his head in the posture that had haunted Henry Montagu from the first instant's glimpse of him.

"For all those endless years, ever since your marriage-night, I've stood beating, beating, beating at the door of life until my wrists have bled! And you didn't hear me! You couldn't and she wouldn't! You didn't want to! You wouldn't listen! And you — you never have heard that desperate pounding and calling, not even tonight, though even so, with that woman out of the way, I made you *feel* me! But *she'd* heard me! She heard me again and again! I made her! I told her what she was, and that you knew it, and I meant it! Her marriage certificate was her license! She gave you a wanton's love, and you gave her just what you got! And I made her understand that! I made her understand it right here in this place! That's why I wanted to come here — I could see only her picture, and I wanted to see a

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real one of them! Until tonight, I could never see either of you, but I always knew where you were!

"And when you brought her here, I made her look at that enemy of me and my kind that I could always *feel* — those women that she was one of and that she *knew* she was one of when I screamed it at her in this place! For *I was with you two that night! I was with you till after you'd gone home, you demons!* That's why she'd never come near the place again, the coward, the miserable coward! That's why I hate her worse than I hate you! There's a pitiful little excuse for the men, because they're *stupider*.

"For the hideous doom of all our hopeless millions, the women are more wickedly to blame, because they must face the fact that we are waiting to get in. God, God, I'd gladly be even a woman, if I could! But you're bad enough — bad enough to deserve the fate you face tonight! And now, God help you, you're facing it, just as I said you would! You deserve it because you were put here with a purpose and you flatly wouldn't fulfil it! God only demands that mankind should be made in His image. In a wisdom that you have no right to question. He lets the images go their own way, as you've gone yours. Yet you, and all others like you, the simple, humble image-workers, instead of rejoicing that you have work to do, set your little selves up far greater than Great God, and actually decide whether men shall even *be!*

"You have a lot of hypercritical, self-justifying theories about it — that it's better for them not to live at all than to suffer some of the things that life, even birth itself, can wither them with. But there never yet was any living creature, no matter how smeared and smitten, that told the truth when he said he wished he'd never been born, while we, the countless millions of the lost, pound and shriek for life — forever shriek and hope! That's the worst anguish of the lost — they hope! I've shown what can be done through that anguish, as it's never been shown before. Even the terrible night that woman died, I hoped! I hoped more than ever, for knowing then that for all eternity it was too late, I hoped for *revenge!* And revenge was my right! Yes, every solitary soul has a right to *live*, even if it lives to wreck, kill, madden its parents! And now, oh, God, I've got my revenge when I no longer want it! The way you took me in, the way you wanted me to stay when I'd almost frightened you to death, made me want to spare you! It was my fate that I — I liked you — I — *more* than liked you. And I tried to save you! Oh, God, God, *how* I've tried!"

As he stood with his hands thrown forth again and his wretched eyes staring into those of the white-faced man, Henry Montagu met the wild gaze unflinchingly. He had sat dumbstruck and shuddering, but the spasmodic quivering of his body had lessened into calmness, and his whispered, slow words gained in steadiness as they came: "My boy, I admit you've nearly

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driven me to madness just now. I was close to the border! I can't dispute one shred of reproach, of accusation, of contempt. Your fearful explanation of this night, the awful import of your visit and yourself have shaken me to the center of my being. But its huge consistency is that of a madman. You poor, you pitiful, deluded boy, you tell me to believe you are an unborn soul, while you stand there and exist before my eyes!"

The boy gave a cry of agony — agony so immortal that as he sank into his chair he clutched the table.

"I *don't* exist! Didn't I tell you my secret was more terrible than any living heart had ever held? I'm real to you since I made you let me into your thoughts tonight. I'm real to you, and through your last moment of consciousness through eternity I always will be! But I won't be with you! You don't believe me yet, but the moment you do, I won't be here! And I never can be real to any other creature in the universe — *not even to that prostitute who refused to be my mother!* I don't exist, and never can exist!"

"But you do! You do! You do! You're there before me now!" gasped Mr. Montagu through chattering teeth. "How can you deny that you're sitting here with me in this restaurant? I forgive you — I love you, and I forgive you, but, thank God, *I see through you at last!* You're a fanatic, a poor, frenzied maniac on this subject; through your devilish understanding and divination you've guessed at that conversation between me and my wife, and like the creature I pictured you in my house, a ravening, devouring thing, you've sought to drag me into your hell of madness! But you shan't! You know you're there before my eyes, and just so truly as you are, not one syllable do I believe of what you've told me!"

As the boy sprang with a venomous shout to his feet, all the hate in his terrible being sprang tenfold into his eyes.

"Do you call me 'maniac,' and 'creature'? Do you dare deny me, now, after all I've told you? You coward, you *coward!* You've denied me life, but you can't deny this night! The people in this place will let you know presently! I tried to spare you. Though I'd thirsted for my revenge I pleaded with you, *prayed* to you to spare yourself! If you'd stayed in the house, you might have come to your senses and forgotten me! But what hope for you is there *now?* Do you still believe I exist? Look back at the night! Do you remember the portrait? You commanded me to stop — commanded, as you've always commanded my fate, and I was powerless. To me, that was a parental command — from *you,* you who deliberately *wouldn't* be my parent! Did you see me wince under it? If you hadn't done it, you'd have found me out right then! I'm not a physical thing, and I couldn't have moved it! I only *said* I was going to Maurice's! I couldn't have come here if you hadn't brought me! Have I eaten or drunk tonight? I've not, for I'm not a *creature!* And

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mad, I? Look to yourself, as I told you to look before it was too late! You fool, you've been staring inoffensive women out of countenance, with all the hate from my face printed on yours, and in the eyes of all these people you've been sitting here for half an hour talking to yourself, and ordering wine and food for an empty chair! *You* won't ever believe you're mad, but everyone else will!"

"So help me God," cried Henry Montagu, white and trembling, "you're there! I swear you're there!"

"So help you God, I'm *there!*" cried the boy frightfully, pointing straight at him. "Right there, in your brain, there, there, and *only* there! I'm no more flesh and blood than — than I *ever* was, *because, you murderer, you and your damned wife never would let me be!* Do you see through me *now?*"

"No! No!" screamed Mr. Montagu. "I *don't* see through you! I don't!"

But as he leaned forward to clutch at him in his terror, all that he could see before him was a closed door beyond a dozen tables, a disused entranceway diagonally opposite the one that had let them in. "I *don't* believe you!" he wailed. "Oh, my God, *where are you?*" He turned frantically to the men and women nearest him. "You saw him! There *was* a boy with me, wasn't there? Wasn't there? Yes, see, there, isn't he going for that door? Oh, my boy, my boy!" And he dashed toward it. He heard the terrible screams of women, and chairs and a table crashed in his wake. He reached it. It was locked.

Desperately sobbing, he hurled himself against it.

It seemed to him as if all the men in the restaurant fell upon him. Strong, merciless hands dragged down and pinioned the wrists with which he had beaten against the door.

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SECOND-PRIZE WINNER: ANTHONY GILBERT

Riddle: In the detective-story field when is a man not a man? Answer: When he's a woman. If that isn't clear, let us give you some startling examples of gentlemen gendarmes who, on closer examination, prove to be members of the so-called gentler sex. . . . The name Kieran Abbey certainly sounds like a man's, yet it is merely a pseudonym used by the creator of Inspector McKee, Helen Reilly. There is a story behind the way in which the pen-name Kieran Abbey was invented, but of that some other time. . . . Then consider three other fellows known as Robert Orr Chipperfield, David Fox, and Douglas Grant. Not one of these gay blades would be permitted to attend a Players Club pipe night, which is traditionally for men only; all three are writing aliases adopted by that grand old lady of the genre, Isabel Egenton Ostrander (will you ever forget her Inspector Timothy McCarty?)

The names Leslie Ford (suggesting the 'tec team of Colonel Primrose and Grace Latham) and David Frome (famous for the Mr. Pinkerton series) are one-hundred-percent masculine. But it's only a snare and a delusion: Leslie Ford and David Frome are none other than Mrs. Zenith Brown, and if you have ever seen a picture of Mrs. Brown — facing page 214 in Howard Haycraft's MURDER FOR PLEASURE *— you would have no doubts whatever of "Leslie's" and "David's" gender. . . . To continue: Frank Danby (dilettante deducer Keightley Wilbur) is Julia Frankau; Faraday Keene (remember her Professor Leonidas Ames in* PATTERN IN BLACK AND RED*?) is Cora Jarrett; the unmistakably masculine Charles L. Leonard (portrayer of the rough, tough Paul Kilgerrin) is Mary Violet Heberden; John Stephen Strange (chronicler of Barney Gantt) is Mrs. Dorothy Stockbridge Tillett; and by no means last, Christopher Hale (who records the Bill French adventures) is a lady named Mrs. Frances Ross Stevens.*

Then there is a quartette of male authors known to the world as Robert Paye, John Winch, and more notedly as George Preedy and Joseph Shearing. Is there any possible question as to the virile manliness of these names? Yet all four hide the identity of a feminine fictioneer — and in spades. Collectively, Robert, John, George, and Joseph are "Marjorie Bowen" — and in turn, to prove once and for all the deviousness of the female of the species, "Marjorie Bowen" is an English woman named Mrs. Gabrielle Margaret Vere Campbell Long.

In all honesty, can you trust our present-day mistresses of manhunting? Surely it behooves us to be wary. So, when a gentleman from London

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named Anthony Gilbert submitted the first Arthur Crook short story to EQMM's contest, and when that short story moreover won a second prize, even then your Editor refused to have the wool pulled over his eyes. Cautiously, suspiciously, we asked the queenly question: Who is Anthony Gilbert? Is he truly an Anthony, or is he really an Antonia? Should we doubt the evidence of the name, or should we name the evidence of our doubt? Is Anthony a he or a she, a mister or a mistress, a member of the fair sex or the unfair sex?

Plainly it was our duty to find out: editors should educate. So we add this new revelation to detective-story lore: Anthony Gilbert is a man in name only; the creator of Arthur Crook, the author of that excellent thriller, THE WOMAN IN RED *(movie title, "My Name is Julia Ross," starring Nina Foch and Dame May Whitty), and of those other fine detective novels,* THIRTY DAYS TO LIVE *and* MYSTERY IN THE WOODSHED, *is a lady of crime whose real name is Lucy Beatrice Malleson. But we guarantee that you will like "You Can't Hang Twice" none the less for all her appellative hocus-pocus.*

YOU CAN'T HANG TWICE

by ANTHONY GILBERT

THE MIST that had been creeping up from the river during the early afternoon had thickened into a grey blanket of fog by twilight, and by the time Big Ben was striking nine and people all over England were turning on their radio sets for the news, it was so dense that Arthur Crook, opening the window of his office at 123 Bloomsbury Street and peering out, felt that he was poised over chaos. Not a light, not an outline, was visible; below him, the darkness was like a pit. Only his sharp ears caught, faint and far away, the uncertain footfall of benighted pedestrian and the muffled hooting of a motorist ill-advised enough to be caught abroad by the weather.

"An ugly night," reflected Arthur Crook, staring out over the invisible city. "As bad a night as I remember." He shut the window down. "Still," he added, turning back to the desk where he had been working for the past twelve hours, "it all makes for employment. Fogs mean work for the doctor, for the ambulance driver, for the police and the mortician, for the daring thief and the born wrong 'un."

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Yes, and work, too, for men like Arthur Crook, who catered specially for the lawless and the reckless and who was known in two continents as the Criminals' Hope and the Judges' Despair.

And even as these thoughts passed through his mind, the driver was waiting, unaware of what the night was to hold, the victim crept out under cover of darkness from the rabbit-hutch-cum-bath that he called his flat, and his enemy watched unseen but close at hand.

In his office, Mr. Crook's telephone began to ring.

The voice at the other end of the line seemed a long way off, as though that also were muffled by the fog, but Crook, whose knowledge of men was wide and who knew them in all moods, realized that the fellow was ridden by fear.

"Mr. Crook," whispered the voice and he heard the pennies fall as the speaker pressed Button B. "I was afraid it would be too late to find you . . ."

"When I join the forty-hour-a-week campaign I'll let the world know," said Crook, affably. "I'm one of those chaps you read about. Time doesn't mean a thing to me. And in a fog like this it might just as well be nine o'clock in the morning as nine o'clock at night."

"It's the fog that makes it possible for me to call you at all," said the voice mysteriously. "You see, in the dark, one hopes he isn't watching."

Hell, thought Crook disappointedly. Just another case of persecution mania, but he said patiently enough, "What is it? Someone on your tail?"

His correspondent seemed sensitive to his change of mood. "You think I'm imagining it? I wish to Heaven I were. But it's not just that I'm convinced I'm being followed. Already he's warned me three times. The last time was tonight."

"How does he warn you?"

"He rings up my flat and each time he says the same thing. 'Is that you, Smyth? Remember — silence is golden' and then he rings off again."

"On my Sam," exclaimed Crook, "I've heard of better gags at a kids' party. Who is your joking friend?"

"I don't know his name," said the voice, and now it sounded further away than ever, "but — he's the man who strangled Isobel Baldry."

Everyone knows about quick-change artists, how they come onto the stage in a cutaway coat and polished boots, bow, go off and before you can draw your breath they're back in tinsel tights and tinfoil halo. You can't think how it can be done in the time, but no quick-change artist was quicker than Mr. Crook when he heard that. He became a totally different person in the space of a second.

"Well, now we are going places," he said, and his voice was as warm as a fire that's just been switched on. "What did you say your name was?"

"Smyth."

"If that's the way you want it . . ."

"I don't. I'd have liked a more distinguished name. I did the best I

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could spelling it with a Y, but it hasn't helped much. I was one of the guests at the party that night. You don't remember, of course. I'm not the sort of man people do remember. She didn't. When I came to her house that night she thought I'd come to check the meter or something. She'd never expected me to turn up. She'd just said, 'You must come in one evening. I'm always at home on Fridays,' and I thought she just meant two or three people at most . . ."

"Tête-a-tête with a tigress," said Crook. "What are you anyhow? A lion-tamer?"

"I work for a legal firm called Wilson, Wilson and Wilson. I don't know if it was always like that on Fridays, but the house seemed full of people when I arrived and — they were all the wrong people, wrong for me, I mean. They were quite young and most of them were either just demobilized or were waiting to come out. Even the doctor had been in the Air Force. They all stared at me as if I had got out of a cage. I heard one say, He looks as if he had been born in a bowler hat and striped p-pants. They just thought I was a joke."

And not much of one at that, thought Mr. Crook unsympathetically.

"But as it happens, the joke's on them," continued the voice, rising suddenly. "Because I'm the only one who knows that Tom Merlin isn't guilty."

"Well, *I* know," Mr. Crook offered mildly, "because I'm defendin' him, and I only work for the innocent. And the young lady knows or she wouldn't have hauled me into this — the young lady he's going to marry, I mean. And of course the real murderer knows. So that makes four of us. Quite a team. Suppose you tell us how you know?"

"Because I was behind the curtain when *he* came out of the Turret Room. He passed me so close I could have touched him, though of course I couldn't see him because the whole house was dark, because of this game they were playing, the one called Murder. I didn't know then that a crime had been committed, but when the truth came out I realized he must have come out of the room where she was, because there was no other place he could have come from."

"Look," said Mr. Crook, "just suppose I've never heard this story before." And probably he hadn't heard this one, he reflected. "Start from page one and just go through to the end. Why were you behind the curtain?"

"I was hiding — not because of the game, but because I — oh, I was so miserable. I ought never to have gone. It wasn't my kind of party. No one paid any attention to me except to laugh when I did anything wrong. If it hadn't been for Mr. Merlin I wouldn't even have had a drink. And he was just sorry for me. I heard him say to the doctor, Isobel ought to remember everyone's human, and the doctor — Dr. Dunn — said, it's a bit late in the day to expect that."

"Sounds a dandy party," said Crook.

"It was — terrible. I couldn't under-

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stand why all the men seemed to be in love with her. But they were. She wasn't specially goodlooking, but they behaved as though there was something about her that made everyone else unimportant."

Crook nodded over the head of the telephone. That was the dead woman's reputation. A courtesan manquee — that's how the press had described her. Born in the right period she'd have been a riot. As it was, she didn't do so badly, even in 1945.

"It had been bad enough before," the voice went on. "We'd had charades, and of course I'm no good at that sort of thing. The others were splendid. One or two of them were real actors on the stage, and even the others seemed to have done amateur theatricals half their lives. And how they laughed at me — till they got bored because I was so stupid. They stopped after a time, though I offered to drop out and just be audience; and then I wanted to go back, but Miss Baldry said how could I when she was three miles from a station and no one else was going yet? I could get a lift later. Murder was just as bad as the rest, worse in a way, because it was dark, and you never knew who you might bump into. I bumped right into her and Tom Merlin once. He was telling her she better be careful, one of these days she'd get her neck broken, and she laughed and said, Would you like to do it, Tom? And then she laughed still more and asked him if he was still thinking of that dreary little number — that's what she called her — he'd once thought he might marry. And asked him why he didn't go back, if he wanted to? It was most uncomfortable. I got away and found a window onto the flat roof, what they call the leads. I thought I'd stay there till the game was over. But I couldn't rest even there, because after a minute Mr. Merlin came out in a terrible state, and I was afraid of being seen, so I crept round in the shadows and came into the house through another window. And that's how I found myself in the Turret Room."

"Quite the little Lord Fauntleroy touch," observed Crook, admiringly. "Well?"

"Though, of course, all the lights were out, the moon was quite bright and I could see the blue screen and I heard a sound and I guessed Miss Baldry was hidden there. For a minute I thought I'd go across and find her and win the game, but another second and I realized that there was someone — a man — with her."

"But you don't know who?"

"No."

"Tough," said Crook. "Having a good time, were they?"

"I don't know about a good time. I think the fact is everyone had been drinking rather freely, and they were getting excited, and I never liked scenes — I haven't a very strong stomach, I'm afraid — so I thought I'd get out. They were so much engrossed in one another — You have it coming to you, Isobel — I heard him say. I got out without them hearing me — I did fire-watching, you

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know, and one learns to move quietly."

"Quite right," assented Crook. "No sense startling a bomb. Well?"

"I went down a little flight of stairs and onto a landing, and I thought I heard feet coming up, so I got behind the curtain. I was terrified someone would discover me, but the feet went down again and I could hear whispers and laughter — everything you'd expect at a party. They were all enjoying themselves except me."

"And Isobel, of course," suggested Crook.

"She had been — till then. Well, I hadn't been behind the curtain for very long when the door of the Turret Room shut very gently, and someone came creeping down. He stopped quite close to me as if he were leaning over the staircase making sure no one would see him come down. I scarcely dared breathe — though, of course, I didn't know then there had been a murder — and after a minute I heard him go down. The next thing I heard was someone coming up, quickly, and going up the stairs and into the Turret Room. I was just getting ready to come out when I heard a man calling, Norman! Norman! For Pete's sake . . . and Dr. Dunn — he was the R.A.F. doctor, but of course you know that — called out, I'm coming. Where are you? And the first man — it was Andrew Tatham, the actor, who came out of the Army after Dunkirk — said, Keep the women out. An appalling thing's happened."

"And, of course, the women came surgin' up like the sea washin' round Canute's feet?"

"A lot of people came up, and I came out from my hiding-place and joined them, but the door of the Turret Room was shut, and after a minute Mr. Tatham came out and said, We'd better all go down. There's been an accident, and Dr. Dunn joined him and said, What's the use of telling them that? They'll have to know the truth. Isobel's been murdered, and we're all in a spot."

"And when did it strike you that you had something to tell the police?" enquired Crook drily.

"Not straight away. I — I was very shocked myself. Everyone began to try and remember where they'd been, but, of course, in the dark, no one could really prove anything. I said, I was behind that curtain. I wasn't really playing, but no one listened. I might have been the invisible man. And then one of the girls said, Where's Tom? and Mr. Tatham said, That's queer. Hope to Heaven he hasn't been murdered, too. But he hadn't, of course. He joined us after a minute and said, A good time being had by all? and one of the girls, the one they called Phoebe, went into hysterics. Then Mr. Tatham said, Where on earth have you been? and he said he was on the leads. He wasn't playing either. They all looked either surprised or — a bit disbelieving, and Dr. Dunn said, But if you were on the leads you must have heard something, and he said, Only the usual row. Why? Have we had a murder? And Mr. Tatham said, Stop it, you fool. And

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then he began to stare at all of us, and said, Tell me, what is it? Why are you looking like that? So then they told him. Some of them seemed to think he must have heard noises, but Dr. Dunn said that if whoever was responsible knew his onions there needn't be enough noise to attract a man at the farther end of the flat roof, particularly as he'd expect to hear a good deal of movement and muttering and so on."

"And when the police came — did you remember to tell them about the chap who'd come out of the Turret Room? or did you have some special reason for keeping it dark?"

"I — I'm afraid I rather lost my head. You see, I was planning exactly what I'd say when it occurred to me that nobody else had admitted going into that room at all, and I hadn't an atom of proof that my story was true, and — it isn't as if I knew who the man was . . ."

"You know," said Crook, "it looks like I'll be holding your baby when I'm through with Tom Merlin's."

"I didn't see I could do any good," protested Mr. Smyth. "And then they arrested Mr. Merlin and I couldn't keep silent any longer. Because it seemed to me that though I couldn't tell them the name of the murderer or even prove that Mr. Merlin was innocent, a jury wouldn't like to bring in a verdict of guilty when they heard what I had to say."

"Get this into your head," said Crook, sternly. "They won't bring in a verdict of guilty in any circumstances. I'm lookin' after Tom Merlin, so he won't be for the high jump this time. But all the same, you and me have got to get together. Just where do you say you are?"

"On the Embankment — in a call-box."

"Well, what's wrong with you coming along right now?"

"In this fog?"

"I thought you said the fog made it safer."

"Safer to telephone, because the box is quite near my flat." He broke suddenly into a queer convulsive giggle. "Though as a matter of fact I began to think the stars in their courses were against me, when I found I only had one penny. Luckily, there was one in my pocket — I keep one there for an evening paper —"

"Keep that bit for your memoirs," Crook begged him. "Now all you've got to do is proceed along the Embankment . . ."

"The trams have stopped."

"Don't blame 'em," said Crook.

"And I don't know about the trains, but I wouldn't dare travel by Underground in this weather, and though I think there was one taxi a little while ago . . ."

"Listen!" said Crook. "You walk like I told you till you come to Charing Cross. You can't fall off the Embankment and if there's no traffic nothing can run you down. The tubes are all right, and from Charing Cross to Russell Square is no way at all. Change at Leicester Square. Got that? You can be in my office within twenty-

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five minutes. I'm only three doors from the station."

"Wouldn't tomorrow . . .?" began Smyth, but Crook said, "Not it. You might have had another warning by tomorrow and this time it might be a bit more lethal than an anonymous telephone message. Now, don't lose heart. It's like going to the dentist. Once it's done, it's over for six months. So long as X. thinks you're huggin' your guilty secret to your own buzoom you're a danger to him. Once you've spilt the beans you're safe."

"It's a long way to Charing Cross," quavered the poor little rabbit.

"No way at all," Crook assured him. "And never mind about the trams and the taxi-cabs. You might be safer on your own feet at that."

Thus is many a true word spoken in jest.

"And now" ruminated Mr. Crook, laying the telephone aside and looking at the great pot-bellied watch he drew from his pocket, "first, how much of that story is true? and second, how much are the police going to believe? If he was a pal of Tom Merlin's, that's just the sort of story he would tell, and if it's all my eye and Betty Martin, he couldn't have thought of a better. It don't prove Tom's innocent, but as he says, it's enough to shake the jury."

It was also, of course, the sort of story a criminal might tell, but in that case he'd have told it at once. Besides, even the optimistic Mr. Crook couldn't suspect Mr. Smyth of the murder. He wasn't the stuff of which murderers are made.

"No personality," decided Crook. "Black tie, wing collar, umbrella and brief-case, the 8.10. every week-day — Yes, Mr. Brown. Certainly, Mr. Jones. I will attend to that, Mr. Robinson. Back on the 6.12. regular as clockwork, a news-reel or pottering with the window-boxes on Saturday afternoons, long lie-in on Sunday" — that was his program until the time came for his longest lie-in of all.

And at that moment neither Mr. Smyth nor Arthur Crook had any notion how near that was.

Crook looked at his watch. "Five minutes before the balloon goes up," he observed. It went up like an actor taking his cue. At the end of five minutes the telephone rang again.

As he made his snails-pace of a way towards Charing Cross Mr. Smyth was rehearsing feverishly the precise phrases he would use to Mr. Crook. He was so terrified of the coming interview that only a still greater terror could have urged him forward. For there was nothing of the hero about him. The services had declined to make use of him during the war, and it had never occurred to him to leave his safe employment and volunteer for anything in the nature of war-work. Fire-watching was compulsory.

"The fact is, I wasn't born for greatness," he used to assure himself. "The daily round, the common task . . . I never wanted the limelight." But it looked as though that was precisely what he was going to get.

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For the hundredth time he found himself wishing he had never met Isobel Baldry, or, having met her, had never obeyed the mad impulse which made him look up the number she had given him and virtually invite himself to her party. The moment he arrived he knew she had never meant him to accept that invitation.

The darkness seemed full of eyes and ears. He stopped suddenly to see whether he could surprise stealthy footsteps coming after him, but he heard only the endless lapping of black water against the Embankment, the faint noise of the police launch going downstream, and above both these sounds, the frenzied beating of his own heart. He went on a little way, then found to his horror that he could not move. In front of him the darkness seemed impenetrable; behind him the atmosphere seemed to close up like a wall, barring his retreat. He was like someone coming down the side of a sheer cliff who suddenly finds himself paralyzed, unable to move a step in either direction. He didn't know what would have happened, but at that moment a car came through the fog travelling at what seemed to him dangerous speed. It was full of young men, the prototype of those he had met at Isobel Baldry's ill-starred party. They were singing as they went. That gave him a fresh idea, and without moving he began to call "Taxi! Taxi!" Someone in the car heard him and leaned out to shout, "No soap, old boy" but now panic had him in its grip. And it seemed as if then his luck changed. Another vehicle came more slowly through the darkness.

"Taxi!" he called, and to his relief he heard the car stop.

Relief panted in his voice. "I want to go to Bloomsbury Street. No. 123. Do you know it?"

"Another client for Mr. Cautious Crook." The driver gave a huge chuckle. "Well, well."

"You — you mean you know him?"

"All the men on the night shift know about Mr. Crook. Must work on a night shift 'imself, the hours 'e keeps."

"You mean — his clients prefer to see him at night?" He was startled.

"Yerss. Not so likely to be reckernized by a rozzer, see? Oh, 'e gets a queer lot. Though this is the first time I've bin asked to go there in a fog like this." His voice sounded dubious. "Don't see 'ow it can be done, guvnor."

"But you must. It's most important. I mean, he's expecting me."

"Sure? On a night like this? You should worry."

"But — I've only just telephoned him." Now it seemed of paramount importance that he should get there by hook or crook.

"Just like that. Lumme, you must be in a 'urry."

"I am. I — I don't mind making it worth your while . . . " It occurred to him that to the driver this sort of conversation might be quite an ordinary occurrence. He hadn't realized

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before the existence of a secret life dependent on the darkness.

"Cost yer a quid," the driver said promptly.

"A pound?" He was shocked.

"Mr. Crook wouldn't be flattered to think you didn't think 'im worth a quid," observed the driver.

Mr. Smyth made up his mind. "All right."

"Sure you've got it on you?"

"Yes. Oh, I see." He saw that the man intended to have the pound before he started on the journey, and he fumbled for his shabby shiny notecase and pulled out the only pound it held and offered it to the driver. Even in the fog the driver didn't miss it. He snapped on the light inside the car for an instant to allow Mr. Smyth to get in, then put it off again, and his fare sank sprawling on the cushions, The driver's voice came to him faintly as he started up the engine.

"After all, guvnor, a quid's not much to save yer neck."

He started. His neck? His neck wasn't in danger. No one thought he'd murdered Isobel Baldry. But the protest died even in his heart within a second. Not his neck but his life — that was what he was paying a pound to save. Now that the car was on its way he knew a pang of security. He was always nervous about journeys, thought he might miss the train, get into the wrong one, find there wasn't a seat. Once the journey started he could relax. He thought about the coming interview; he was pinning all his faith on Arthur Crook. He wouldn't be scared; the situation didn't exist that could scare such a man. And perhaps, he reflected, lulling himself into a false security, Mr. Crook would laugh at his visitor's fears. That's just what I wanted, he'd say. You've solved the whole case for me, provided the missing link. Justice should be grateful to you, Mr. Smyth. . . . He lost himself in a maze of prefabricated dreams.

Suddenly he realized that the cab, which had been crawling for some time, had now drawn to a complete standstill. The driver got down and opened the door.

"Sorry, sir, this perishin' fog. Can't make it, after all."

"You mean, you can't get there?" He sounded incredulous.

"It's my neck as well as yours," the driver reminded him.

"But — I must — I mean are you sure it's impossible? If we go very slowly . . ."

"If we go much slower we'll be proceedin' backwards. Sorry, guvnor, but there's only one place we'll make tonight if we go any further and that's Kensal Green. Even Mr. Crook can't help you once you're there."

"Then — where are we now?"

"We ain't a 'undred miles from Charing Cross," returned the driver cautiously. "More than that I wouldn't like to say. But I'm not taking the cab no further in this. If any mug likes to try pinchin' it 'e's welcome."

Reluctantly Mr. Smyth crawled out into the black street; it was bitterly cold and he shivered.

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"I'll 'ave to give you that quid back," said the driver, wistfully.

"Well, you didn't get me to Bloomsbury Street, did you?" He supposed he'd have to give the fellow something for his trouble. He put out one hand to take the note and shoved the other into the pocket where he kept his change. Then it happened, with the same shocking suddenness as Isobel Baldry's death. His fingers had just closed on the note when something struck him with appalling brutality. Automatically he grabbed harder, but it wasn't any use; he couldn't hold it. Besides, other blows followed the first. A very hail of blows in fact, accompanied by shock and sickening pain and a sense of the world ebbing away. He didn't really appreciate what had happened; there was too little time. Only as he staggered and his feet slipped on the wet leaves of the gutter, so that he went down for good, he thought, the darkness closing on his mind for ever, "I thought it was damned comfortable for a taxi."

It was shortly after this that Arthur Crook's telephone rang for the second time, and a nervous voice said, "This is Mr. Smyth speaking. I'm sorry I can't make it. I — this fog's too thick. I'll get lost. I'm going right back."

"That's all right," said Crook heartily. "Don't mind me. Don't mind Tom Merlin. We don't matter."

"If I get knocked down in the fog and killed it won't help either of you," protested the voice.

"Come to that, I daresay I won't be any worse off if you are."

"But — you can't do anything tonight."

"If I'm goin' to wait for you I shan't do anything till Kingdom Come."

"I — I'll come tomorrow. It won't make any difference really."

"We've had all this out before," said Crook. "I was brought up strict. Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today."

"But I can't — that's what I'm telling you. I'll come — I'll come at nine o'clock tomorrow."

"If he lets you," said Crook darkly.

"He?"

"He might be waiting for you on the doorstep. You never know. Where are you by, the way?"

"In a call-box."

"I know that. I heard the pennies drop. But where?"

"On the Embankment."

"What's the number?"

"It's a call-box, I tell you."

"Even call-boxes have numbers."

"I don't see . . ."

"Not trying to hide anything from me, Smyth, are you?"

"Of course not. It's Fragonard 1511."

"That's the new Temple exchange. You must have overshot your mark."

"Oh? Yes. I mean, have I?"

"You were coming from Charing Cross. You've walked a station too far."

"It's this fog. I thought — I thought it was Charing Cross just over the

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road."

"No bump of locality," suggested Crook, kindly.

"I can't lose my way if I stick to the Embankment. I'm going straight back to Westminster and let myself into my flat, and I'll be with you without fail at nine sharp tomorrow."

"Maybe," said Crook pleasantly. "Happy dreams." He rang off. "Picture of a gentleman chatting to a murderer," he announced. "Must be a dog's life, a murderer's. So damned lonely. And dangerous. You can't trust anyone, can't confide in anyone, can't even be sure of yourself. One slip and you're finished. One admission of something only the murderer can know and it's the little covered shed for you one of these cold mornings. Besides, you can't guard from all directions at once, and how was the chap who's just rung me to know that Smyth only had two coppers on him when he left his flat tonight, and so he couldn't have put through a second call?"

The inference was obvious. Someone wanted Mr. Crook to believe that Smyth had gone yellow and that was why he hadn't kept his date. Otherwise — who knew? — if the mouse wouldn't come to Mahomet, Mahomet might go looking for the mouse. And later, when the fog had dispersed, some early workman or street cleaner, perhaps even a bobby, would stumble over a body on the Embankment, and he — Crook — would come forward with his story and it would be presumed that the chap had been bowled over in the dark — or even manhandled for the sake of any valuables he might carry. Crook remembered his earlier thought — work for the doctor, for the ambulance driver, for the mortician — and for Arthur Crook. Somewhere at this instant Smyth lay, deprived forever of the power of passing on information, rescuing an innocent man, helping to bring a guilty one to justice, somewhere between Temple Station and Westminster Bridge.

"And my bet 'ud be Temple Station," Crook told himself.

It was a fantastic situation. He considered for a moment ringing the police and telling them the story, but the police are only interested in crimes after they've been committed, and a murder without a corpse just doesn't make sense to them at all. So, decided Mr. Crook, he'd do all their spadework for them, find the body and then sit back and see how they reacted to that. He locked his office, switched off the lights and came tumbling down the stairs like a sack of coals. It was his boast that he was like a cat and could see in the dark, but, even he took his time getting to Temple Station. Purely as a precaution he pulled open the door of the telephone booth nearby and checked the number. As he had supposed, it was Fragonard 1511.

There was a chance, of course, that X. had heaved the body over the Embankment, but Crook was inclined to think not. To begin with, you couldn't go dropping bodies into the

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Thames without making a splash of some sort, and you could never be sure that the Thames police wouldn't be passing just then. Besides, even small bodies are heavy, and there might be blood. Better on all counts to give the impression of a street accident. Crook had known of cases where men had deliberately knocked out their victims and then ridden over them in cars. Taking his little sure-fire pencil torch from his pocket Crook began his search. His main fear wasn't that he wouldn't find the body, but that some interfering constable would find him before that happened. And though he had stood up to bullets and blunt instruments in his time, he knew that no career can stand against ridicule. He was working slowly along the Embankment, wondering if the fog would ever lift, when the beam of his torch fell on something white a short distance above the ground. This proved to be a handkerchief tied to the arm of one of the Embankment benches. It was tied hard in a double knot, with the ends spread out, as though whoever put it there wanted to be sure of finding it again. He looked at it for a minute before its obvious significance occurred to him. Why did you tie a white cloth to something in the dark? Obviously to mark a place. If you didn't, on such a night, you'd never find your way back. What he still didn't know was why whoever had put out Smyth's light should want to come back to the scene of the crime. For it was Smyth's handkerchief. He realized that as soon as he had untied it and seen the sprawling letters "Smyth" in one corner. There was something peculiarly grim about a murderer taking his victim's handkerchief to mark the spot of the crime. After that it didn't take him long to find the body. It lay in the gutter, the blood on the crushed forehead black in the bright torchlight, the face dreadful in its disfigurement and dread. Those who talked of the peace of death ought to see a face like that; it might quiet them a bit, thought Mr. Crook grimly. He'd seen death so often you'd not have expected him to be squeamish, but he could wish that someone else had found Mr. Smyth.

Squatting beside the body like a busy little brown elephant, he went through the pockets. He'd got to find out what the murderer had taken that he had to return. Of course, someone else might have found the body and left the handkerchief but an innocent man, argued Crook, would have left his own. You'd have to be callous to take things off the body of a corpse. There wasn't much in the dead man's pockets, a note-case with some ten-shilling notes in it, a season ticket, some loose cash, an old-fashioned turnip watch — that was all. No matches, no cigarettes, of course no handkerchief.

"What's missing?" wondered Mr. Crook, delving his hands into his own pockets and finding there watch, coin-purse, note-case, identity card, tobacco pouch, latch-key. . . . "That's it," said Mr. Crook. "He hasn't got

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a key. But he talked of going back and letting himself in, so he had a key. . . ." There was the chance that it might have fallen out of his pocket, but though Crook sifted through the damp sooty leaves he found nothing; he hadn't expected to, anyhow. There were only two reasons why X. should have wanted to get into the flat. One was that he believed Smyth had some evidence against him and he meant to lay hands on it; the other was to fix an alibi showing that the dead man was alive at, say, 10:30, at which hour, decided Mr. Crook, the murderer would have fixed an alibi for himself. He instantly cheered up. The cleverest criminal couldn't invent an alibi that an even cleverer man couldn't disprove.

He straightened himself, and as he did so he realized that the corpse had one of its hands folded into a fist; it was a job to open the fingers, but when he had done so he found a morsel of tough white paper with a greenish blur on the torn edge. He recognized that all right, and in defiance of anything the police might say he put the paper into his pocket-book. The whole world by this time seemed absolutely deserted; every now and again a long melancholy hoot came up from the river from some benighted tug or the sirens at the mouth of the estuary echoed faintly through the murk; but these were other-worldly sounds that increased rather than dispelled the deathlike atmosphere. As to cause of death, his guess would be a spanner. A spanner is a nice anonymous weapon, not too difficult to procure, extraordinarily difficult to identify. Only fools went in for fancy weapons like sword-sticks and Italian knives and loaded riding-crops, all of which could be traced pretty easily to the owners. In a critical matter like murder it's safer to leave these to the back-room boys and stick to something as common as dirt. Crook was pretty common himself, and, like dirt, he stuck.

"The police are going to have a treat tonight," he told himself, making a bee-line for the telephone. His first call was to the dead man's flat, and at first he thought his luck was out. But just when he was giving up hope he could hear the receiver being snatched off and a breathless voice said, "Yes?"

"Mr. Smyth? Arthur Crook here. Just wanted to be sure you got back safely."

"Yes. Yes. But only just. I decided to walk after all."

"Attaboy!" said Mr. Crook. "Don't forget about our date tomorrow."

"Nine o'clock," said the voice. "I will be there."

Mr. Crook hung up the receiver. What a liar you are, he said, and then at long last he dialed 999.

The murderer had resolved to leave nothing to chance. After his call to Mr. Crook's office he came back to the waiting car and drove as fast as he dared back to the block of flats where he lived. At this hour the man in charge of the car park would have

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gone off duty, and on such a night there was little likelihood of his encountering anyone else. Carefully he ran the car into an empty space and went over it carefully with a torch. He hunted inside in case there should be any trace there of the dead man, but there was none. He had been careful to do all the opening and closing of doors, so there was no fear of fingerprints, but when he went over the outside of the car his heart jumped into his mouth when he discovered blood-marks on the right-hand passenger-door. He found an old rag and carefully polished them off, depositing the rag in a corner at the further end of the car park. This unfortunately showed up the stains of mud and rain on the rest of the body, but he hadn't time to clean all the paintwork; there was still a lot to be done and, as he knew, there is a limit to what a man's nervous system can endure. Locking the car he made his way round to the entrance of the flats. The porter was just going off; there wasn't a night porter, labor was still scarce, and after 10:30 the tenants looked after themselves.

"Hell of a night, Meadows," he observed, drawing a long breath. "I was beginning to wonder if I'd be brought in feet first."

The porter, a lugubrious creature, nodded with a sort of morbid zest.

"There'll be a lot of men meeting the Recording Angel in the morning that never thought of such a thing when they went out tonight," he said.

His companion preserved a poker face. "I suppose a fog always means deaths. Still, one man's meat. It means work for doctors and undertakers and ambulance-men. . . ." He didn't say anything about Arthur Crook. He wasn't thinking of Arthur Crook. Still under the man's eye he went upstairs, unlocked the door of his flat, slammed it and, having heard the man depart, came stealing down again, still meeting no one, and gained the street. So far everything had gone according to plan.

It took longer to get to Westminster than he had anticipated, because in the fog he lost his way once, and began to panic, which wasted still more time. His idea was to establish Smyth alive and talking on his own telephone at, say, 10:30 P.M. Then, if questions should be asked, Meadows could testify to his own return at 10:30. On his way back, he would return the key to the dead man's pocket, replace the handkerchief, slip home under cover of darkness. . . . He had it worked out like a B.B.C. exercise.

Luck seemed to be with him. As he entered the flats the hall was in comparative darkness. It was one of those houses where you pushed a button as you came in and the light lasted long enough for you to get up two floors; then you pushed another button and that took you up to the top. There wasn't any lift. As he unlocked the door of the flat the telephone was ringing and when he unshipped the receiver there was Arthur Crook, of all the men on earth, calling up the dead man. He shivered to think how

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nearly he'd missed that call. He didn't stay very long; there was still plenty to do and the sooner he got back to his own flat the more comfortable he'd feel. And how was he to guess that he would never walk inside that flat again?

He congratulated himself on his foresight in tying the handkerchief to the arm of the bench; in this weather he might have gone blundering about for an hour before he found the spot where Smyth lay in the gutter, his feet scuffing up the drenched fallen leaves. As it was he saw his landmark, by torchlight, without any trouble. It was then that things started to go wrong. He was level with the seat when he heard the voice of an invisible man exclaim, "Hey there!" and he jumped back, automatically switching off his torch, and muttering, "Who the devil are you?"

"Sorry if I startled you," said the same voice, "but there's a chap here seems to have come to grief. I wish you'd take a look at him."

This was the one contingency for which he had not prepared himself, but he knew he dared not refuse. He couldn't afford at this stage to arouse suspicion. Besides, he could offer to call the police, make for the call-box and just melt into the fog. Come what might, he had to return the dead man's key. He approached the curb and dropped down beside the body. Crook watched him like a lynx. This was the trickiest time of all; if they weren't careful he might give them the slip yet.

"Have you called the police?" enquired the newcomer, getting to his feet. "If not, I . . . . " But at that moment both men heard the familiar sound of a door slamming and an inspector with two men hovering in the background came forward saying, "Now then, what's going on here."

"Chap's got himself killed," said Crook.

X. thought like lightning. He made a slight staggering movement, and as Crook put out his hand to hold him he said, "Silly — slipped on something — don't know what it was." He snapped on his torch again, and stooping, picked up a key. "Must have dropped out of his pocket," he suggested. "Unless," he turned politely to Crook, "unless it's yours."

Crook shook his head.

"Which of you was it called us up?" the Inspector went on.

"I did," said Crook. "And then this gentleman came along and . . ." he paused deliberately and looked at the newcomer. It was a bizarre scene, the men looking like silhouettes against the grey blanket of fog with no light but the torches of the civilians and the bulls-eyes of the force. "Seeing this gentleman's a doctor. . ." As he had anticipated there was an interruption.

"What's that you said?"

"Penalty of fame," said Crook. "Saw your picture in the papers at the time of the Baldry case. Dr. Noel Dunn, isn't it? And praps I should introduce myself. I'm Arthur Crook, one of the three men living who *know*

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Tom Merling didn't kill Miss Baldry, the others bein' Tom himself and, of course, the murderer."

"Isn't that a coincidence?" said Dr. Dunn.

"There's a bigger one coming," Crook warned him. "While I was waitin' I had a looksee at that little chap's identity card, and who do you think he is? Mr. Alfred Smyth, also interested in the Baldry case."

The doctor swung down his torch. "So that's where I'd seen him before? I had a feeling the face was familiar in a way, only . . ."

"He is a bit knocked about, isn't he?" said Crook. "What should you say did that?"

"I shouldn't care to hazard a guess without a closer examination. At first I took it for granted he'd been bowled over by a car . . ."

"In that case we ought to be able to trace the car. He can't have gotten all that damage and not left any of his blood on the hood."

There was more noise and a police ambulance drove up and spewed men all over the road. Crook lifted his head and felt a breath of wind on his face. That meant the fog would soon start to lift. Long before morning it would have gone. The inspector turned to the two men.

"I'll want you to come with me," he said. "There's a few things I want to know."

"I can't help you," said Dunn sharply, but the inspector told him, "We'll need someone to identify the body."

"Mr. Crook can do that. He knows him."

"Always glad to learn," said Crook.

"But you . . ." He stopped.

"You don't know the police the way I do," Crook assured him. "Just because a chap carries an identity card marked Alfred Smyth — that ain't proof. I never set eyes on him before."

"Mr. Crook's right," said the inspector. "We want someone who saw him when he was alive."

They all piled into the car, Crook and Dunn jammed together, and no one talked. Dunn was thinking hard. Sold for a sucker, he thought. If I hadn't tried so hard for an alibi — perhaps, though, they won't touch Meadows. Meadows will remember, all the same. He'll think it's fishy. And the car. Of course there was blood on the car. If they examine it they'll notice it's washed clean in one place. They'll want to know why. No sense saying I was coming back from the pictures. Meadows can wreck that. Besides, Baron, the man who looks after the cars, may remember mine hadn't come in when he went off duty. Round and round like a squirrel in its cage went his tormented mind. There must be some way out, he was thinking, as thousands have thought before him. They've no proof, no actual proof at all. Outwardly he was calm enough, maintaining the attitude that he couldn't imagine why they wanted him. But inside he was panicking. He didn't like the station surroundings, he didn't like the look

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on the inspector's face, most of all he feared Crook. The police had to keep the rules, Crook had never heard of Queensberry. To him a fair fight was gouging, shoving, and kicking in the pit of the stomach. A terrible man. But he stuck to it, they hadn't got anything on him that added up to murder. He'd had the forethought to get rid of the spanner, dropped it in one of those disused pig buckets that still disfigured London's streets; but he'd had to use the one near his own flats, because in the dark he couldn't find any others. He thought now the river might have been safer.

He tried to seem perfectly at ease, pulled off his burberry and threw it over the back of a chair, produced his cigarette case.

"Of course, our own doctor will go over the man," the inspector said, "but how long should you say he'd been dead, Dr. Dunn?"

He hesitated. "Not so easy. He was a little chap and it's a bitter cold night. But not long."

"But more than twenty minutes?" the Inspector suggested.

"Yes, more than that, of course."

"That's screwy," said the inspector. "I mean, Mr. Crook was talking to him on the telephone in his flat twenty minutes before you happened along."

He couldn't think how he'd forgotten that telephone conversation. That, intended for his prime alibi, was going to ball up everything.

"I don't see how he could," he protested. "Not unless the chap's got someone doubling for him."

"You know all the answers," agreed Crook. "Matter of fact, the same chap seems to be making quite a habit of it. He rang me a bit earlier from Fragonard 1511 to tell me Smyth couldn't keep an appointment tonight. Well, nobody knew about that but Smyth and me, so how did X. know he wasn't coming, if he hadn't made sure of it himself?"

"Don't ask me," said Dunn.

"We are asking you," said the inspector deliberately.

The doctor stared. "Look here, you're on the wrong tack if you think I know anything. It was just chance. Why don't you send a man round to Smyth's flat and see who's there?"

"We did think of that," the inspector told him. "But there wasn't anyone . . ."

"Then — perhaps this is Mr. Crook's idea of a joke."

"Oh no," said Crook looking shocked. "I never think murder's a joke. A living perhaps, but not a joke."

Dunn made a movement as though to rise. "I'm sorry I can't help you . . ."

"I wouldn't be too sure about that," drawled Crook.

"What does that mean?"

"There's just one point the inspector hasn't mentioned. When I found that poor little devil tonight he'd got a bit of paper in his hand. All right, inspector. I'll explain in a minute. Just now, let it ride." He turned back to Dr. Noel Dunn. "It was a bit of a treasury note, and it seemed to me

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that if we could find the rest of that note, why then we might be able to lay hands on the murderer."

"You might. And you think you know where the note is?"

"I could make a guess."

"If you think I've got it . . ." Dunn pulled out his wallet and threw it contemptuously on the table. "You can look for yourself."

"Oh, I don't expect it would be there," replied Crook, paying no attention to the wallet. "But — every murderer makes one mistake, Dunn. If he didn't, God help the police. And help innocent men, too. And a man with murder on his hands is like a chap trying to look four ways at once. Now that note suggested something to me. You don't go round carrying notes in a fog, as if they were torches. You'd only get a note out if you were going to pay somebody, and who's the only person you're likely to want to pay in such circumstances? I'm talking like a damned politician," he added disgustedly. "But you do see what I'm drivin' at?"

"I'm only a doctor," said Dunn. "Not a professional thought-reader."

"You'd pay a man who drove you to your destination — or tried to. There was some reason why Smyth had a note in his hand, and my guess is he was tryin' to pay some chap off. That would explain his bein' at Temple Station. On his own feet he wouldn't have passed Charing Cross, not a chap as frightened of the dark as he was. While he was offerin' the note, X. knocked him out, and realizin' that funny questions might be asked if the note was found with him, he'd remove it. You agree so far?"

"I don't know as much about murder as you do, Mr. Crook," said Dunn.

"That's your trouble," Mr. Crook agreed. "That's always the trouble of amateurs setting up against pros. They're bound to lose. Let's go on. X. removes the note. So far, so good. But he's got a lot to remember and not much time. He can't be blamed if he don't remember it's trifles that hang a man. If I was asked, I'd say X. shoved that note into his pocket, meanin' to get rid of it later, and I'd say it was there still."

"You're welcome to search my pockets," Dunn assured him. "But I warn you, Crook, you're making a big mistake. Your reputation's not going to be worth even the bit of a note you found in Smyth's hand when this story breaks."

"I'll chance it," said Crook.

At a nod from the inspector the police took up Dunn's burberry and began to go through the pockets. During the next thirty seconds you could have heard a pin drop. Then the man brought out a fist like a ham, and in it was a crumpled ten-shilling note with one corner missing!

"Anything to say to that?" enquired Crook.

Dunn put back his head and let out a roar of laughter. "You think you're smart, don't you? You planted that on me, I suppose, when we were coming. But, as it happens, Smyth's note was for a pound, not ten shillings. You

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didn't know that, did you?"

"Oh, yes," said Crook, "I did — because I have the odd bit of the note in my wallet. One of the old green ones it was. What I'm wondering is — *how did you?*"

"That was highly irregular, Mr. Crook," observed the Inspector, drawing down the corners of his mouth, after the doctor had been taken away.

"It beats me how the police even catch as many criminals as they do," returned Crook frankly. "Stands to reason if you're after a weasel you got to play like a weasel. And a gentleman — and all the Police Force are gentlemen — don't know a thing about weasels."

"Funny the little things that catch 'em," suggested the Inspector, wisely letting that ride.

"I reckoned that if he saw the wrong note suddenly shoved under his nose he wouldn't be able to stop himself. It's what I've always said. Murderers get caught because they're yellow. If they just did their job and left it at that, they might die in their beds at 99. But the minute they've socked their man they start feverishly buildin' a little tent to hide in, and presently some chap comes along, who might never have noticed them, but gets curious about the little tent. When you start checking up his story I bet you'll find he's been buildin' alibis like a beaver buildin' a dam. And it's his alibis are goin' to hang him in the end."

His last word in this case was to Tom Merlin and the girl Tom was still going to marry.

"Justice is the screwiest thing there is," he told them. "You're not out of chokey because Noel Dunn killed the Baldry dame, though he's admitted that, too. Well, why not? We know he got Smyth, and you can't hang twice. But it was his killing Smyth that put you back on your feet. If he hadn't done that, we might have had quite a job straightenin' things out. Y'know the wisest fellow ever lived? And don't tell me Solomon."

"Who, Mr. Crook?" asked Tom Merlin's girl, hanging on Tom's arm.

"Brer Rabbit. And why? Becos he lay low and said nuffin. And then they tell you animals are a lower order of creation!"

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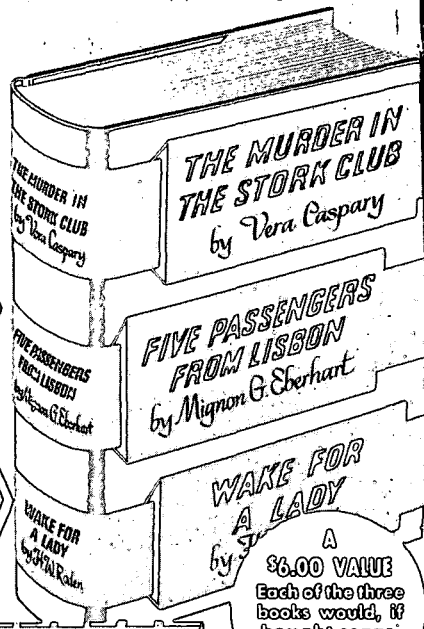

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